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**The Activation of the Social is the Art:
SUPERFLEX and the Development of *Superkilen***

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Dedication

For my daughter, Scarlett Snow O'Brien, who brings so much sunshine to my life and has taught me so much about love.

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Abstract

The Activation of the Social is the Art: SUPERFLEX and the Development of *Superkilen*

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The symbiotic relationship between contemporary culture and public space is leading to new modes of creating and experiencing art. In this emerging form of artistic practice, artists directly engage with communities to create new work. Defying easy categorization, this practice has received numerous labels in an attempt to more clearly define the genre, including socially engaged art. One distinctive element of this collaborative form is the role of the urban environment, and, specifically, public space.

This study explores how the Danish artist collective, SUPERFLEX, collaborated with community members in the ethnically diverse neighborhood of Nørrebro in Copenhagen, Denmark to create *Superkilen*, a public park spanning roughly one kilometer of urban terrain. Engaging community members with SUPERFLEX's concept of *participation extreme*, *Superkilen* evolved into a constellation of more than one hundred curated objects from over fifty different countries. The result of many years of collaboration between artists, architects, designers, and community members, the site demonstrates how public space can be renegotiated in the urban context.

This study also investigates the essential concepts underpinning the creation of socially engaged art for public spaces, as well as the implications of critical spatial practice and the activation of the social sphere in works of art. For art education, further investigation into the realm of socially engaged art offers avenues for exploring how art can have practical implications in society. Most critically, art educators can demonstrate how creative exchange can be a pathway for underserved groups and invisible communities to participate in the public sphere.

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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

The symbiotic relationship between contemporary culture and public space is leading to new modes of creating and experiencing art. In this emerging form of artistic practice, artists directly engage with communities to create new work. Defying easy categorization, this practice has received numerous labels in an attempt to more clearly define the genre, including socially engaged art, relational aesthetics, or dialogic art. One distinctive element of this collaborative form is the role of the urban environment. Viewed from Lefebvre's (1996) perspective of the city as an *oeuvre*—or work of art—urban sites are now the catalyst for the creation of new works. Going one step further, Michel de Certeau (1984) investigates this notion in *The Practice of Everyday Life* by asking: what can we learn from how groups or individuals *use* this urban space? In answering this question, this emergent form of collaborative artistic practice gives insight into the production of culture in urban life.

This study attempts to observe and describe this phenomenon by examining the urban site, *Superkilen*, in Copenhagen, Denmark. For ten days in June 2016, I lived in the ethnically diverse neighborhood Nørrebro in a first-floor apartment on Midgårdsgade, directly across from *Superkilen*. During my stay, I observed the site and interviewed community members. I also had the opportunity to tour *Superkilen* with SUPERFLEX, the artists involved in the creation of the site, and to meet the project's architect, Bjarke Ingels, at BIG's studio. In the following pages, I describe my experiences and encounters at *Superkilen*, as well as engage with the literature surrounding this type of artistic practice. I also explore applications of this emergent form in community-based art education settings.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions motivated and guided the direction for this research:

Central Research Question

How does the public space, *Superkilen*, demonstrate the process of creating socially engaged art?

Sub-Questions

How did the Danish artist collective, SUPERFLEX, engage with community members and collaborate with stakeholders, in order to shape the vision for *Superkilen*?

How does *Superkilen* invite participation in an ethnically diverse neighborhood?

PROBLEM STATEMENT

As artists continue to move beyond the traditional boundaries of studios, galleries, and museums for the creation and presentation of art, communities are becoming integral collaborators in the process of artmaking. In addition, artists are increasingly collaborating with architects and designers to create public spaces rich in art and culture. For twenty years, critics and art historians have been grappling with how to define and categorize these new currents in contemporary art. While themes of participation, collaboration, and community engagement are the loose threads stitching together these new forms of contemporary art, the hyperlocal and responsive nature of this type of artistic practice resists generalization and homogenization. Similarly, these contemporary artistic practices deserve greater attention in the field of community-based art education. With a special focus on elements of participation and collaboration, these contemporary forms offer art educators new models for engaging diverse and changing audiences in community settings.

MOTIVATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Along the back fence of the house where I grew up, my mother planted a row of crepe myrtles, and, for more than thirty years now, their magenta and pale pink blossoms have swayed in the heat every June and July, a tribute to the Texas summer. Throughout the year, you could watch the sunset through their leaves, over a vast pasture of grazing cattle; the sky would fade from blue to Dreamsicle orange, and, if a volcano had erupted in Mexico, spectacular shades of ruby red would wash over the horizon. As I am writing this, my parents have sold this house and are moving out in a matter of weeks. This place I knew so well, where I watched sunsets for more than thirty-five years of my life, is no longer my home.

When my parents decided to build this house in the country outside of Houston over thirty years ago, the landscape was full of dirt roads, rice fields, and herds of cattle. Today, sprawling developments of suburban tract homes have eaten away at the land like a plague. The wide-open spaces of my childhood have been permanently altered by asphalt, concrete, and pipelines slicing through the earth. While change is inevitable, I have been preoccupied with a deep concern that everything is for sale in Texas, and no one cares what you do with it. After living in Austin for twenty years, I have similar concerns about the city's rapid population growth dramatically changing neighborhoods and pushing out residents with rampant gentrification.

As I began the task of researching for my thesis, I was motivated to study thoughtful developments of public spaces that bring people together as an antidote to unchecked growth. I was especially interested in the role of artists, communities, and collaborative artmaking in this process. My research is both intensely personal and universal; I set out to explore how to elevate the quotidian experience of walking through a city, the routine

of everyday life, to a sublime experience. Or, said differently, I wanted to discover how to capture the feeling I had when I watched the sunset through the crepe myrtles in my backyard growing up—the feeling that I was experiencing something special in a place that had significant meaning for me. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) terms this bond between humans and place *topophilia*: humans can develop deep psychological attachment to where they live.

All of this dovetails with my work at The Contemporary Austin, where I currently raise funding for art, education, and capital improvements at the museum. Presently, we are developing Laguna Gloria into a Sculpture Park in collaboration with the landscape architecture firm, Reed Hilderbrand. When completed, the site will be a space for the public to experience exceptional works of contemporary art in a lush and vibrant natural setting. We are also collaborating with the City of Austin on the integration of art into the development of Waller Creek and numerous public parks. In essence, The Contemporary Austin is evolving into a museum without walls. As all of the museum's projects move forward, we have an opportunity to engage community in the process of designing spaces and creating artwork for public display.

Of particular interest to me in my professional work is redefining the role of the museum and the artist in the community. Through my research, I wanted to discover how to create a city rich in art, where people can encounter and engage with art outside the traditional museum environment. I also want to discover how artists create art beyond the boundaries of traditional galleries and museums by deeply engaging with communities. As I look ahead to the future, I believe the outcomes of this thesis provide me a solid understanding of important concepts and theories related to community engagement through art in public spaces.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research methodology I employed to answer my proposed research question was a qualitative case study. I utilized this approach in order to conduct a “comprehensive examination of a phenomenon” (Gerring, 2007, p. 17). As Simons (2009) suggests, I conducted preliminary planning for my research by reviewing the literature in order to being sharpening the focus of my study. Also, I refined my study of artists who collaborate with communities on the design of public spaces by narrowing the focus of my study on *Superkilen*. In June 2016, I traveled to Copenhagen for ten days to observe *Superkilen* and to conduct interviews with stakeholders and community members.

As Yin (2009) notes, evidence for case studies include “. . . documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts” (p. 98). I employed triangulation by examining multiple sources of evidence (Gerring, 2007). My tools to gather data included semi-structured interviews, observations at the site, as well as construction documents, and I conducted my data analysis by coding, concept mapping, and theme generation (Simons, 2009). A more detailed description of my research methodology and investigative activities is elaborated in Chapter 3.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

BIG: Bjarke Ingles Group, a Danish architecture firm based in Copenhagen that collaborated on the design of *Superkilen* with Topotek-1 and SUPERFLEX.

Nørrebro: An ethnically diverse neighborhood in the city of Copenhagen, Denmark.

Socially engaged Art: Art emphasizing collaboration, participation, and community.

SUPERFLEX: Danish artist collective founded in 1993 by Jakob Fenger, Rasmus Nielsen, and Bjørnstjerne Chrisitansen.

Superkilen: A public space in the Nørrebro neighborhood in Copenhagen, Denmark designed by the Danish artist collective SUPERFLEX, Danish architect Bjark Ingles, and German landscape architecture firm, Topotek 1.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Every day, thousands of residents and tourists in Copenhagen walk, run, bicycle, skateboard, play, eat, celebrate, and hang out at *Superkilen*. During my ten-day stay in Nørrebro, I had the opportunity to interview individuals who lived and worked near *Superkilen*; however, it simply was not feasible to conduct a large-scale survey of users at the site during my research trip. While it would be fascinating to learn more about how the larger community interacts with the site, this study is limited to the viewpoints expressed by the individuals I was able to interview during my stay.

In addition, while this study explores socially engaged art and experiential public spaces, the main focus of this study is *Superkilen*. Presently, numerous artists and collectives are practicing socially engaged art around the globe. Likewise, countless public spaces in urban environments are sites for the presentation of art on every continent. However, this study is not a comprehensive examination of these two spheres. Rather, this study is limited to the work of SUPERFLEX at the distinct and specific public project, *Superkilen*.

BENEFITS TO THE FIELD OF ART EDUCATION

Perceived benefits of this study to the field of art education center on highlighting the value of collaborative artistic practices, which deserve greater attention in the field of community-based art education. By illustrating how artists can collaborate with

communities on large-scale public projects, and, specifically, by examining SUPERFLEX's process of extreme community participation, this study advocates for art educators to adopt similar techniques for producing art and to investigate themes of participation with learners. As an art form that deemphasizes the individual skills and solitary work traditionally associated with artistic production, collaborative artistic practice can both challenge and enliven art education settings. Further, as art educators engage with increasingly diverse audiences and learners, skills associated with collaborative artistic practice can promote acceptance and understanding of difference.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

This thesis is composed of five interrelated chapters. In Chapter 1, I provide an introduction to the study and review my motivations for undertaking my research of *Superkilen*. In Chapter 2, I relate the story of the development of *Superkilen* to provide the reader additional context for this study, and I examine the relevant literature related to *Superkilen* and socially engaged art, as well as art in public spaces, specifically art in urban environments. In Chapter 3, I discuss my research methodology for this study and describe my experiences conducting research in Copenhagen. In Chapter 4, I will analyze the data gathered during my research, including interviews, personal observations, documents, and photographs. In Chapter 5, I conclude the study with reflections for the field of community-based art education and offer recommendations for new directions in practice and research in art education.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Superkilen is a tangible expression of vital currents in contemporary art and culture. The result of many years of collaboration between artists, architects, designers, and community members, the site demonstrates how space can be renegotiated in the urban context. As both a public space and a participatory work of art, *Superkilen* underscores the complexity of community as a disparate collection of individuals and subgroups with diverging and intersecting narratives that define contemporary life. In this way, *Superkilen* calls attention to the impermanence of homogeneity, vividly illustrating how urban communities are no longer monolithic. To further explore the relationship of community, participation, and art, this thesis attempts to dissect the essential concepts underpinning the development of *Superkilen* and to tie these concepts back to realm of art education.

The following literature review weaves together multiple sources that are relevant to the concepts explored in this thesis. To answer my research question, I traveled to Denmark to conduct interviews and to observe the site at *Superkilen*. Considering this, the sources referenced below are not intended to represent data for my research. Rather, these sources illuminate important ideas and concepts embodied in *Superkilen*. To gain a deeper understanding of these ideas and concepts, this literature review is divided into five areas: (a) a synoptic overview of *Superkilen* and the artists, architects, and designers involved in the development of the site; (b) a discussion of core principles associated with socially engaged art; (c) a concise description of the role of public art in the urban environment; (d) a brief consideration of space as an integral component of material culture; and (e) an exploration of socially engaged art in the context of art education.

SUPERKILEN

Spanning roughly one kilometer in the ethnically diverse neighborhood of Nørrebro in Copenhagen, Denmark, *Superkilen* is a patchwork of art, furniture, fountains, hardscapes, and playscapes sandwiched between buildings, roads, bike paths, and green lawns. This unusual slice of urban space is how the site derived its name: *Superkilen* literally translates from Danish to English as “super wedge.” While the physical boundaries of the site topographically resemble elongated polygons, metaphorically the site could be seen as a form that supports and binds together the local community. Once an impoverished neighborhood struggling with intermittent violence and civil unrest, Nørrebro is currently experiencing transition away from this challenged past while remaining a socially mixed community with large numbers of immigrants (Steiner, 2013).

Superkilen originated in 2009 as a public works project by the City of Copenhagen, which released an open call to architects and designers to re-imagine a public space in Nørrebro. Funded in part by Realdania, a charitable foundation in Denmark, the goals for the project aligned with the City of Copenhagen’s vision to create a city which encourages “more urban life for all,” “more people to walk more,” and “more people to stay longer” (Copenhagen, 2009). Clearly, these type of people-oriented public policies are working well for Denmark; in recent years, Denmark has consistently ranked number one in the United Nation’s World Happiness Report, which ranks nations across the world according to specific benchmarks such as social support, freedom to make life choices, healthy life expectancy, and GDP per capita (Sachs, 2016).

To create the site, the City of Copenhagen chose a design by the Danish architecture firm, Bjarke Ingles Group (BIG), and the German landscape design group, Topotek 1. A collective of three Danish artists, Jakob Fenger, Bjørnstjerne Christiansen, and Rasmus

Nielsen—who create art under the name SUPERFLEX—also participated in the development of the concept for the park. At the inception of the project, waves of anxiety were sweeping over Europe after a series of riots and homicides across the continent had propelled a crisis over immigration. It was in this climate that the City of Copenhagen ambiguously directed the team to address the issue of migration through the project, as the residents in Nørrebro represented dozens of ethnic groups from more than sixty countries across the globe. As the project moved forward, the team decided to take this theme of migration very literally, dividing the site into three spatial areas—the Black Market, the Red Square, and the Green Park—and integrating objects from all over the world to represent the diversity of the neighborhood (Steiner, 2013).

While BIG and Topotek 1 had contractually defined roles from the beginning of the project—specifically, to design elements of the site—the role of SUPERFLEX was initially unclear. Over time, it became apparent the site lacked a narrative, and the task best suited for SUPERFLEX would be to develop a conceptual framework for the site, which, for the artists of SUPERFLEX, meant uncovering the voice of the people living near the site. Yet, SUPERFLEX felt the mandatory citizen participation process for public works projects had become rote and standardized—surveys, workshops, meetings, etc., always with the same groups of concerned Danish citizens—and SUPERFLEX began imagining alternative ways to engage with community. The artists decided to take the standard model of participation and stretch it beyond recognition to *participation extreme* (Steiner, 2013).

Ablating the conventional boundaries of community participation, SUPERFLEX deliberately sought out groups not usually represented in the customary participation process—such as youth and the elderly—and started conversations about how to represent

their stories of migration. At music concerts, dance classes, and gyms, SUPERFLEX established contact with community members, some of whom were initially skeptical about SUPERFLEX's motivations and reluctant to participate. During the course of a year, SUPERFLEX engaged with five distinct and eclectic groups from Nørrebro—including two elderly Danes from a walking group, two elderly Danes from a line dancing group, two young men from a Thai boxing club, two young women from Palestine, and two young hip hop artists—in order to further develop the concept for the site.

With funding from the Danish Art Council, SUPERFLEX fully realized their vision for extreme community participation by taking international trips with each of the different groups of community members to select objects for public display at the site. The artists from SUPERFLEX traveled across the globe with the groups—to Jamaica to retrieve a sound system, to Texas to find a dance pavilion, to Palestine to dig out soil from a hillside, to Thailand to choose a boxing ring, and to Spain to locate a giant metal bull. Simultaneously, BIG's office cast a wider net, soliciting input from the community on desired features at the site, as well as suggestions for additional objects to display from around the world. A jury comprised of SUPERFLEX, BIG, and Topotek 1 evaluated ideas and selected the final objects to be included at the site.

From this extreme community participation, *Superkilen* evolved into a constellation of more than one hundred curated objects placed among undulating hills of black asphalt, bright red pavement, and pulsating fields of green grass, almost as if the site were a canvas for a painting. The collection of objects have cultural and personal significance, and, interestingly, the meaning of the objects have not been lost in translation. Rather, the concept of the park—to copy and paste objects from a specific cultural context and place them in a new cultural context—has given new life and new meaning to the objects. The

assortment of objects includes a neon dentist sign from Qatar, a sound system from Jamaica, a boxing ring from Thailand, a phone booth from Brazil, a bus stop from Pakistan, a dance pavilion from the United States, a manhole cover from Israel, and soil from Palestine.

Aesthetically, the site is visually striking, possibly even shocking for Danish culture. Architect Bjarke Ingles of BIG related that even the color scheme for the project—red, black and green—was not without controversy. While Ingles insists the selected colors were benign, the choice roused suspicion from some local Danes as a sympathetic gesture to the Palestinian cause. Yet, the risks the designers and artists took with the site have resulted in a playful, experiential public space that invites participation from the community. *Superkilen* opened to the public in June 2012 to great acclaim and has become an iconic space in contemporary Danish culture, popping up in advertisements and garnering numerous awards. SUPERFLEX's push for extreme community participation created a space that is symbolic of the people and culture of Nørrebro at this very moment. As Jakob Fenger of SUPERFLEX notes:

We do not have a dream that *Superkilen* should look exactly like this for the next 15,000 years. It is a concept that fits into a specific time, very much rooted in our time. It has become a marker for how we look at this neighborhood, and how we look at this whole idea of immigration. (Steiner, 2013, p. 76)

SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART

A conceptual work of art, *Superkilen* prioritizes participation over decoration and represents an alternative mode of creating art. Through their vision for extreme community participation, SUPERFLEX gave power to the powerless, and, as a result, gave the community ownership of the site. Much of the art in contemporary Western culture is

privately owned and exorbitantly priced—an object to be possessed, perhaps hung over a couch in a living room or displayed in the lobby of a corporation, serving as a symbol of wealth and power. Resistance to the commodification of art began taking shape across contemporary Western culture in tandem with turbulent political movements in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the counterculture, the civil rights movement, and feminism. During this time, artists began to imagine new ways of creating art in collaboration with audiences, and the negotiation of the meaning of collaborative artistic practice continues today. *Superkilen* is a manifestation of these important undercurrents of contemporary art.

Early seeds of socially engaged art can be traced back to the art movement Fluxus, and, in particular, to the social sculptures of German artist Joseph Bueys. Bueys believed art had the potential to transform society and emphatically declared: “Every human being is an artist” (Tisdall, 1974, p. 48). A charismatic figure who contributed heavily to art theory, Bueys advocated for the integration of art into everyday life and attempted to redefine the potential role of art in social, political, and cultural contexts. Through various performances and public art projects, Bueys was at the forefront of creating interdisciplinary and participatory art.

Similarly, in her seminal text, *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change*, the activist, curator, and critic Lucy Lippard (1984) advocated for political art, or, in her words, “an art that rises up from the experience of the people who are living with it rather than art patronizingly imposed from above” (p. 38). Emphasizing the inseparable relationship of politics and art, Lippard (1984) explained that political art “means community organizing and development, working with people to whom art would normally mean nothing, working with them in their own rather than in an art context” (p. 30).

A decade later, artist and critic Suzanne Lacy (1994) published *Mapping the Terrain*, a collection of essays by artists, critics, and curators examining art created in collaboration with audiences. The publication also includes a compendium of more than ninety artists who worked in this emerging form. With no definitive category in existence for this type of artwork, Lacy termed this artistic practice “new genre” public art. Lacy observed this art form was audience-centric, meaning the artists relinquished aesthetic autonomy in favor of creating work relevant to the audience’s lives. In an effort to further define this emergent form of “connective aesthetics,” the essays in *Mapping the Terrain* explore the shift away from merely siting sculptures in public spaces to thoughtful interventions that invite audience participation (Lacy, 1994, p. 74). With an eye towards inclusiveness, many of the authors note the significant overlap between the production of art and democratic participation in this “new genre” of public art.

Building on these important texts, Tom Finkelpearl (2000) published *Dialogues in Public Art* to give further consideration to collaborative forms of public art. A former director of Queens Museum and current Commissioner of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, Finkelpearl also served as the head of New York City’s Percent for Art program. Throughout the text, Finkelpearl (2000) references multiple art projects that “allow for an open exchange among equals, far from the elitist notion that public art is a gift of the ‘best’ to the people of the city” (p. 45). Such projects include Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ *Touch Sanitation* (1978-80), Maya Lin’s *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (1982), and Rick Lowe’s *Project Row Houses* (1992-present day). To Finkelpearl, the ideas of educational philosopher Paolo Freire—a strong advocate for dialogue, equity, and understanding—have tremendous resonance in the production and exhibition of contemporary art.

In 1998, French curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) further defined this new genre of art in his text, *Relational Aesthetics*. Bourriaud's (2002) definitions and descriptions of relational art center on artists who believe art is a form of living matter; Bourriaud writes that life itself is "an aesthetic, ritualized, shaped form" (p. 107). Bourriaud makes the clear distinction that relational art is not simply an artwork, but a form. For this genre, the form is relational, or, said differently, the form is the creation of social bonds. With existential overtones, Bourriaud examines the fluid nature of relational art—one in which the lines between the audience and the author blur. Bourriaud argues the form is the direct result of global urban culture and is an extension of the city into all cultural phenomenon.

In direct response to Nicolas Bourriaud's text, critic Claire Bishop (2004) takes aim at the idealism and implied social harmony in Bourriaud's curatorial work surrounding relational art. Acknowledging the important contributions Bourriaud has made to the criticism of relational art, Bishop credits Bourriaud with identifying these significant forms of contemporary art. After discussing works by artists Liam Gillick and Rirkrit Tiravanija—both of whom Bourriaud champions in his curating and writing—Bishop critiques their façade of democratic exchange by presenting works by artists Thomas Hirschhorn and Santiago Sierra that confront—rather than harmonize with—audiences. As political, moral, and ethical judgements increasingly weigh on aesthetic choices, Bishop concludes that threads of relational antagonism in works of art are more accurate representations of contemporary democracy and society.

Bishop further examined the evolving role of social relationships in contemporary artistic practice from 1950 to the present day with *Participation* (2006), a selection of essays by philosophers, critics, artists, and curators. Writings by influential philosophers,

including Umberto Eco, Roland Barthes, and Peter Bürger, establish theoretical frameworks for the new role of the viewer in relation to art. Artist's voices are also represented through texts documenting the process of creating art through collaboration, including Lygia Clark, Joseph Bueys, and Thomas Hirschhorn. Additional writings by curators and critics include excerpts from Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, as well as Lars Bang Larsen's *Social Aesthetics*, which details a number of examples of socially engaged art in Scandinavia. For many of these authors and artists, the object has lost significance—or, in the words of Lygia Clark—it is only a “mediator of participation.”

Scholar and critic Grant Kester contributed to this emerging critical dialogue around socially engaged art with the publication of *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2004). Kester's book addresses the emergence of socially engaged art in the 1990s, with a focus on works that address the tensions between avant-garde, antagonistic responses to other cultural forms and community-based art. Kester is especially interested in the “aesthetics of the face-to-face encounter” (p. xx). Drawing heavily on modern and post-modern philosophy, Kester's task is to arrive at theoretical framework for socially engaged art. Arguing that socially engaged projects require a shift in the understanding of what constitutes a work of art, Kester believes socially engaged art is a cumulative process of dialogue and exchange. For Kester, this dialogical aesthetic involves a “process of consultation and action organized around the collective rethinking of the spaces of everyday life” (p. 98).

Refuting critics who see socially engaged projects as social work, Kester argues these projects are art for two reasons: first and foremost, socially engaged art projects activate the artistic process to draw creatively from multiple disciplines; and, secondly, socially engaged art projects utilize artists to facilitate discussion. Kester's contribution to

the growing body of literature on socially engaged art centers on his focus placed on community. Kester notes the most relevant “dialogical works can challenge dominant representations of a given community and create a more complex understanding of, and empathy for, that community among a broader public” (p. 115).

In 2011, Nato Thompson published *Living as Form* to further elaborate on artists creating work in the social sphere. As Artistic Director of Creative Time in New York City, Thompson is at the forefront of curating socially engaged art. *Living as Form* (2011) is Thompson’s clarion call to the art world, advocating for the vibrancy of socially engaged art in contemporary artistic practice. Through a collection of essays and a catalog of more than one hundred projects, Thompson documents this growing form of interdisciplinary cultural production. Arguing the form has roots in strategies for civic engagement, Thompson identifies a handful of similarities among these projects—they are anti-representational, situated in the real world (not a gallery or museum), operate in the political sphere, and emphasize participation. Thompson presents these projects as examples of ways in which artists are uniquely providing creative solutions to community needs and problems.

Starting from a very basic premise—that artists create—Thompson investigates this idea one step further to examine how artists create change. While acknowledging the heterogeneity of the field of socially engaged art, the projects presented all point to artists who are reworking or embedding into social infrastructure. Within this framework, living is not a passive state. Rather, living is a state actively performed and created. In fact, for Thompson, life itself—with all of its rituals—is an aesthetic experience, a shaped form. In contemporary society, living is also something that happens very publicly—via social

media, television, and ubiquitous cameras—and Thompson advocates for artists to strongly embrace public culture.

Thompson further elaborates on this idea in his 2015 publication, *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st Century*. In this text, Thompson focuses on artists who work at the intersection of politics and art. Thompson discusses the work of SUPERFLEX, Paul Chan, Jeremy Deller, Thomas Hirschhorn, and Tania Bruguera, among others. With a critical eye towards the influence of cultural capitalism and social capital on the production of art, Thompson asks readers to seriously consider the power dynamics of socially engaged art. Citing cultural geographer David Harvey, Thompson asks us to consider ideas as space—that history itself orbits around public space—and to move socially engaged art toward ethical spatial production. By illustrating the power of art as activism, Thompson makes a strong case for moving art from the private, commodified space of galleries and museums to alternative sites and infrastructures. Through his focus on the cultural production of space, Thompson touches on a relevant theme for my thesis—the rampant privatization of civic life, and, more specifically, the rampant corporatization of contemporary city life and the extraordinary influence of cultural capitalism.

Similarly, scholar and critic Grant Kester also highlights the political dimensions of socially engaged art through his second publication, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (2011). Kester presents work by artists who engage in collaborative projects, including Thomas Hirschhorn, SUPERFLEX, Francis Alÿs, and Santiago Sierra. Examining how the work of these artists often overlaps with the work of urban planners, nonprofit organizations, and political activists, Kester argues that contemporary artistic practice is presently being negotiated outside the traditional boundaries of museums and galleries. Most importantly, Kester articulates that

these artists are creating new work through reciprocal creative labor with communities and the public, which is in direct opposition to the concept of artists as individuals who labor to create a work of art alone and present their finished work to the public for viewing. Through the process of collaborative production, Kester believes these artists are redefining the role of the artist in society.

Kester's work is a valuable insight into SUPERFLEX's process of engagement and gives additional critical context to their work. Kester speculates that Denmark's social welfare state is, in large part, the genesis of SUPERFLEX. Kester argues that artists in Denmark have the luxury of free art education, as well as numerous social safety nets (health insurance, subsidized housing, etc.), which makes it possible for the artists to move beyond aesthetic concerns and look towards socially engaged art. Kester critiques SUPERFLEX—who often collaborate with disenfranchised communities on commodity production—for operating in the same terrain as nonprofit development organizations, as he is unable to determine if SUPERFLEX is engaging in ironic distancing or sympathetic cooperation.

Recently, additional writings have charted the trajectory of socially engaged art. Building on his previous volume, *Dialogues in Public Art* (2000), Tom Finkelpearl published *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (2014), digging even deeper into cooperative art through in-depth conversations with practicing artists and critics with strong ties to the historical and contemporary threads of the genre. His introductory essay gives readers a comprehensive overview of the evolution of art created through cooperation, citing participatory political movements of the 1960s and 1970s as the genesis of the practice. In the substantial interviews that follow, Finkelpearl's conversations highlight the lineage of important artists and writers to the genre, including

Fluxus, Joseph Bueys, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Tim Rollins, Mary Jane Jacobs, Nicolas Bourriaud, Grant Kester, Rick Lowe, Claire Bishop, and Paulo Freire, among others.

From the beginning of the text, Finkelpearl quickly outlines an important distinction between art created through social cooperation versus art made through social collaboration, arguing the latter implies co-authorship and the former implies that people are simply working together on a project. Finkelpearl makes another very helpful distinction; he argues that cooperative art is created on a spectrum, with scripted encounters on one end and dialogue-based co-creation on the other. The focus of his interviews is the latter—cooperative art—and the subjects of his interviews have significant experience—often many decades practicing in the field. Representing a wide array of interdisciplinary projects, the interviews offer up a rich vocabulary for practicing cooperative art. Some of the key words and phrases that stand out from the interviews include listening, open and flexible, receptivity, reflection, networks, interconnectivity, intervention, and uncovering the meaning of place. All of these ideas point to an approach to artmaking that values interpersonal relationships and community building.

Most recently, MIT Press published the edited volume of essays and interviews, *Public Servants: Art and the Crisis of the Common Good* (2016). Tackling the complex form of socially engaged art, the editors guide readers through the expansive terrain of the field by introducing artists who create works in the public sphere. With a dash of humor, the editors divide artists and educators into chapters under the following “Departments”: Public Works, Security, Labor and Economy, Education, Health and Environment, and Culture. One chapter in particular, Department of Labor and Economy, gives readers detailed descriptions of socially engaged works by Simone Leigh, Ashley Hunt, Pedro Reyes, Jeanne Van Heeswijk, Gregg Bordowitz, Mel Chin, Pablo Helgura, Caroline

Woolard, Jonas Staal, and Andrea Fraser. This diverse group of projects offers readers an introduction to the range of works produced in the field, all of which have vastly different intentions and outcomes as works engaged with social issues.

The final chapter, Department of Culture, features a lively debate about the political effectiveness of socially engaged art with leading scholars, curators, and practitioners, including Deborah Fisher, Tom Finkelpearl, Rick Lowe, and Nato Thompson. This spirited discussion lays bare the problematic issues with socially engaged art—namely, the quandary of artists attempting to be activists—but ends on the note that socially engaged art is, fundamentally, challenging power and privilege with alternative forms of cultural production.

PUBLIC ART IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Superkilen is a work of public art in the urban context—in other words, art that exists outside of the artificial context of the museum environment, and, specifically, art that is woven into the urban fabric. At its core, *Superkilen* represents the opposite of some rococo expression of elite taste—it elevates the everyday, the pedestrian, the common—eroding the designation between high and low art. As Lippard (1984) presciently wrote:

If public art is indeed to be public, if it is to fulfill the social needs of a specific environment as well as to satisfy the aesthetic intent of the artist and to fulfill the highest possibilities of its culture, it must be more than decoration, more than cosmetic, more than an artifact. It must engage at least a portion of its audience at the core of its own experience, and at the same time to extend that experience.
(p. 38)

In this vein, scholar and critic Miwon Kwon's (2002) text, *One Place After Another: Site-specific Art and Local Identity*, is a thought-provoking discussion of the

public experience of space, as well as a bird's-eye view of the history of site-specific art and the current trends in the field. Tracing the genealogy of site-specific art, Kwon emphasizes a major shift in American public policy in the middle 20th century toward the creation of site-specific art through percent-for-art programs, as well as federal, state, and local subsidies for such works of art. Kwon devotes significant text to a discussion of the failure of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981-1989), which was the result of these types of government policies trying to give the people the best of art outside a museum's walls—all without ever engaging in a dialogue with the community. This sets up Kwon's discussion of new genre public art, which reconsidered the relationship of art to the public—and, rather than creating site-specific art, these artists were engaged in creating issue-specific or audience-specific art—what could even be termed post-site sculpture.

Kwon's text documents the artistic endeavor to understand the relationship of subject/object/location, insightfully detailing how public art has transformed from an aesthetic function, to a design function, to a social function. Interestingly, *Superkilen* borrows from all three categories, suggesting SUPERFLEX operates at the intersection of these functions. Kwon's analysis is particularly refreshing as she echoes Grant Kester and castigates the "aesthetic evangelism" of some socially engaged art projects, which raise ethical quandaries around imbalances of power between the artist, the curator, and the community. Kwon steers away from the loaded term "community-based art" and advocates for a new term that accounts for the instability—even ghostly presence—of the public: "collective artistic praxis." Though the term sounds highly academic, it still seems like an apt label for the project at *Superkilen*.

Akin to Kwon's analysis, a number of researchers and theorists have explored the terrain of art in the urban experience. In *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*, cultural

critic Jane Rendell (2006) dissects the links between time, space, and culture, and, in particular, the unique attraction of architecture and contemporary art. Borrowing frameworks from the writings of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, both of whom penned influential critiques of the relationship between space and culture, Rendell traces the recent links between site, art, and architecture. Beginning with land art and artist Robert Smithson's dialectic between site (non-gallery) and non-site (gallery), Rendell discusses threads of this dialectic emerging in the practice of architecture today. Through her writings, Rendell builds a case for public art and architecture that is critically engaged. More succinctly, Rendell advocates for public art that draws attention to social or political problems. Beyond the aesthetic function of public art, Rendell sees the place between art and architecture as both critical and spatial—or, what she terms critical spatial practice.

MATERIAL CULTURE

Jakob Fenger of SUPERFLEX has stated that *Superkilen* is a “copy paste concept” (personal communication, 2016). To create the project, specific objects were selected by participants to be “copied” from their original location and “pasted” into the site. In this regard, material culture is the axis on which *Superkilen* turns. While the field of anthropology has devoted significant attention to material culture, historian and scholar Thomas J. Schlereth has advocated for the study of material culture in other disciplines. Attempting to define the term, Schlereth (1983) makes the important distinction that material culture is something of an oxymoron as “material culture is not culture, but its product” (p. 112).

Art educators Paul Bolin and Doug Blandy (2003) define material culture as “a descriptor of any and all human-constructed or human-mediated objects, forms, or

expressions, manifested consciously or unconsciously through culturally acquired behaviors” (p. 249). Yet, Bolin (2004) makes a critical point about the narratives we assign to objects: “Many of the objects that are meaningful to us are made meaningful by the significance of the stories that surround these objects.”

Bill Brown’s (2001) seminal writing on the significance of inanimate objects, *Thing Theory*, dissects this idea: “As they circulate through our lives, we look *through* objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture—above all, what they disclose about *us*), but we only catch a glimpse of things” (p. 4). In *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*, Jane Rendell (2006) also highlights the cultural importance of objects: “In mediating between real and imaginary spaces, objects provide possibilities for people to exchange ideas and communicate dreams and desires in material form” (p. 147). This concept is clearly illustrated at *Superkilen*, where the objects on view offer the public meaning beyond their aesthetic appearance.

SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART IN ART EDUCATION

As a contemporary art form, socially engaged art can provide art educators new ways of engaging learners. In his brief publication, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, artist Pablo Helguera (2011) succinctly offers readers a working definition of socially engaged art and briefly introduces readers to important ideas underpinning the creation of socially engaged art. Eschewing the term “social practice,” which obscures any reference to actual art-making, Helguera favors the term socially engaged art, which acknowledges art as a discipline and highlights the valuable role of the artist in society. Noting that socially engaged art draws upon the genre of conceptual process art, Helguera underscores the similarities between the process of education and the process of art-making. In

particular, Helguera outlines how socially engaged art requires conversation, participation, and a significant investment of time to engage with an audience. Acknowledging the confusion and ambiguity surrounding socially engaged art as a genre, Helguera advocates for a reconfiguration of art education, particularly in higher education, shifting focus to an interdisciplinary and experiential curriculum that offers students a deeper understanding of how artists can exist in the world.

Along these same lines, Richardson (2010) highlights the pedagogical significance of socially engaged art for art education, arguing the form can empower students to investigate their social environment and to develop new understandings of the relationship of the artist to the world. Richardson (2010) writes: “Developing art educational practice in relationship to this mode of inquiry challenges long-standing approaches to artistic production that privilege individual expression and mimetic reproduction” (p. 20).

In her essay examining the role of multiculturalism in art education, Laurie Hicks (1994) argues:

My formulation of the goal of a socially reconstructed multicultural education as world-travelling without erasure or dislocation presupposes that it is possible to find ways of acknowledging different individuals and communities without reducing them to versions of ourselves, or losing our own sense of who we are, that is, our own sense of location. The goal of social reconstruction in art education is both to critique the privileged perceptions of dominant communities and to facilitate the negotiation of community boundaries by all students. (p. 155)

Perhaps the most valuable outcome for introducing socially engaged art into the classroom is what Hicks (1990) terms “an education to a community of difference” (p. 45). When drawing on the values of feminist pedagogy, such as “bridging, flexibility, fluidity, collaboration, transformation of knowledge, and the valuing of multiple perspectives and voices,” art education can inform a learner’s understanding of self and others (Church,

2010, p. 71). Within this inclusive framework, art education can “inculcate the ideals and capabilities necessary to understand, criticize and oppose oppressive mainstream traditions in the name of a different kind of social and political life” (Hicks, 1990, p. 45). By empowering learners to understand and accept difference, art education can be a mechanism for change within our schools, our communities, and our culture. In this way, perhaps one of the most important roles of artists and art educators is to restore interconnectivity and social bonds disrupted by the hypercommodification of art and contemporary life.

RESEARCH METHOD

My research method for this thesis was a qualitative case study. I utilized this approach in order to conduct a “comprehensive examination of a phenomenon” (Gerring, 2007, p. 17). Merriam (2002) classifies a case study as a specific qualitative research method, particularly “an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit as an individual, group, institution, or community” (p. 8). As Simons (2009) suggests, I conducted preliminary planning for my research by reviewing the literature in order to sharpen the focus of my study. Similarly, Yazan (2002) recommends delimiting the object of study, stating the confines of the data, and participating in extensive analysis in order to bring the case into focus. To achieve this objective, I refined my study of artists who collaborate with communities on the design of public spaces by narrowing the focus of my study on *Superkilen*.

Yin (2009) notes that evidence for case studies include “. . . documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts” (p. 98). In June 2016, I traveled to Copenhagen for ten days to observe *Superkilen* and to

conduct interviews with stakeholders and community members. I employed a semi-structured interview technique to collect data. This approach allows space for open-ended questions and a natural flow of conversation (Bernard & Bernard, 2012). For this research project, I employed triangulation by examining multiple sources of evidence (Gerring, 2007). Since my tools to gather data included semi-structured interviews, observations at the site, and documents, I conducted my data analysis by coding, concept mapping, and theme generation (Simons, 2009).

Further, while *Superkilen* is a vivid example of socially engaged art, the project is also a striking work of visual art. Consequently, images of the site are key elements of my research about the project. Weber (2009) notes that "images can help us access those elusive, hard-to-put-into-words aspects of knowledge that might otherwise remain hidden or are ignored" (p. 45). Similarly, Eisner (1995) argues that images offer an "all-at-once-ness" that words simply cannot emulate (p. 1). Or, as Berger (1972) succinctly asserts: "Seeing comes before words" (p. 7). My photographs of *Superkilen* and my experience living in Copenhagen enhance my research by offering readers a visual complement to my narrative descriptions.

Likewise, my research relies on extensive field notes taken during stay in Copenhagen and during my visits with SUPERFLEX and Bjarke Ingles. Yin (2009) explains that "the conventional manner of collecting observational data takes the form of using your own five senses, taking field notes, and ultimately creating a narrative based on what you might have seen, heard, or otherwise sensed" (p. 11). To this end, the description of my research of *Superkilen* in the following chapter takes the form of a narrative presentation of my experience.

Chapter Three: Ten Days at *Superkilen*

This research project began as a series of fortuitous encounters. While preparing to write this thesis, I was also working full-time as a grant writer at The Contemporary Austin, a contemporary art museum in Austin, Texas with a strong focus on commissioning site-specific work from living artists. One day, during a staff meeting sometime in 2015, our Executive Director, Louis Grachos, presented slides of *Superkilen* when discussing his recent travels to Europe. I was awe-struck by the images of the site; I had never seen anything like it. I was even more intrigued to learn the project involved a collective of Danish artists, SUPERFLEX. Thoughts began percolating in my mind about researching *Superkilen* for my thesis—though it also seemed something of an impossible task, considering I did not know the artists or the architects—not to mention the project was 5,226 miles across the globe.

A few months later, our Director of Exhibitions Production at The Contemporary Austin, Mike Henry, had a pile of books about SUPERFLEX on his desk. I stopped dead in my tracks, and I asked Mike why he was reading about SUPERFLEX. Mike nonchalantly mentioned SUPERFLEX would be coming to install a work at The Contemporary Austin's site at Laguna Gloria. Trying to contain my excitement, I told Mike I had been researching their project, *Superkilen*. Mike was puzzled by this word, "*Superkilen*," and, after explaining the project and why I wanted to write about it for my thesis, Mike said he would be happy to introduce me to SUPERFLEX when they came to Austin. I simply could not believe my luck.

SUPERFLEX IN AUSTIN

It was an average Tuesday—March 8, 2016 to be precise—and I had just wrapped up work for the day in my office in the Solarium of the historic Driscoll Villa at Laguna Gloria. The light shifting to sunset, I was walking to my car when I noticed Mike Henry standing with a group on the lawn in front of the Driscoll Villa. Mike waved to me from across the way and motioned for me to come over. Mike was chatting with SUPERFLEX after giving them a tour of the grounds. He introduced me to the artists of SUPERFLEX—Jakob Fenger, Rasmus Nielsen, and Bjørnstjerne Chrisitansen—as well as the Director of SUPERFLEX’s studio, Maleana Ratcliffe. We all shared a few laughs when I commiserated about the arduous flight from Copenhagen to Austin, and I was struck by how present and focused SUPERFLEX seemed. I just happened to be carrying my copy of *Superkilen*, which I had recently checked out at the Architecture and Planning Library at The University of Texas, and the artists were delighted to see a first edition copy of the book. After exchanging good-byes, we agreed to talk more the next day, when they would be on site again.

SUPERFLEX had traveled from Copenhagen to Austin at the invitation of Louis Grachos to integrate a work of art into The Contemporary Austin’s Sculpture Park. On March 9, 2016, SUPERFLEX presented their artwork, *Lost Money*, at Laguna Gloria. A hybrid of performance art and sculpture, the piece involved the artists tossing 2,000 United States coins around the back terrace of the Driscoll Villa. The coins were then permanently installed by drilling each piece of currency into the concrete terrace surrounding the Villa. First performed in 2009, the work is a wry commentary on world economics—the artists are permanently removing currency from circulation—and a prank at the expense of unwitting visitors who attempt to unsuccessfully pry up what appears to be someone’s

actual lost money. I had the opportunity to view the performance of *Lost Money* with my museum colleagues and to talk with Jakob Fenger at length after the performance about his passion for cycling, socks, and local Tour de France legend Lance Armstrong. I mentioned to Jakob that I was interested in researching *Superkilen*, and he suggested I email their studio Director, Maleana, to arrange a time for us to talk further about the project.



Figure 1: SUPERFLEX's performance for the artists' installation, *Lost Money*, at The Contemporary Austin, March 9, 2016. Pictured from left to right: Bjørnstjerne Chrisitansen, Jakob Fenger, and Rasmus Nielsen. Photograph by Chris Garza.

After meeting SUPERFLEX in Austin, I corresponded with SUPERFLEX'S studio Director via email and arranged to travel to Copenhagen in late June 2016 to research *Superkilen*. Coincidentally, Louis Grachos, The Contemporary Austin's Executive Director, was travelling to Copenhagen at the exact same time, along with members of the museum's Board of Trustees. Before embarking on the trip, Louis' assistant, Stephanie Kingpetcharat, made space for me to join the group on tours of *Superkilen*, SUPERFLEX's studio, and Bjarke Ingles' architecture firm, BIG.

NØRREBRO

Almost cosmically, the stars aligned for my trip to Copenhagen on Airbnb, the short-term rental website. While searching on Airbnb for a place to stay in Copenhagen for ten days, I discovered an apartment rental in Nørrebro across the street from *Superkilen*. Located on Midgårdsgade, the windows of the apartment faced *Superkilen's* iconic striped asphalt hill. The apartment could not have been more perfectly situated for my research.

When my taxi from the Copenhagen airport arrived in Nørrebro, the first thing I noticed was a sign for a shop that read: "Hijab Hus." Being a native Texan, I have rarely seen women wearing hijabs, much less an entire shop devoted to carrying a fashionable assortment of the traditional Islamic veil. As I got out of my taxi and went up to my apartment, I noticed a young girl in a neon pink hijab riding her bicycle up and down *Superkilen's* asphalt hill. These two moments were immediate signals of Nørrebro's striking diversity and *Superkilen's* aspirations to serve as an anchor for the community.

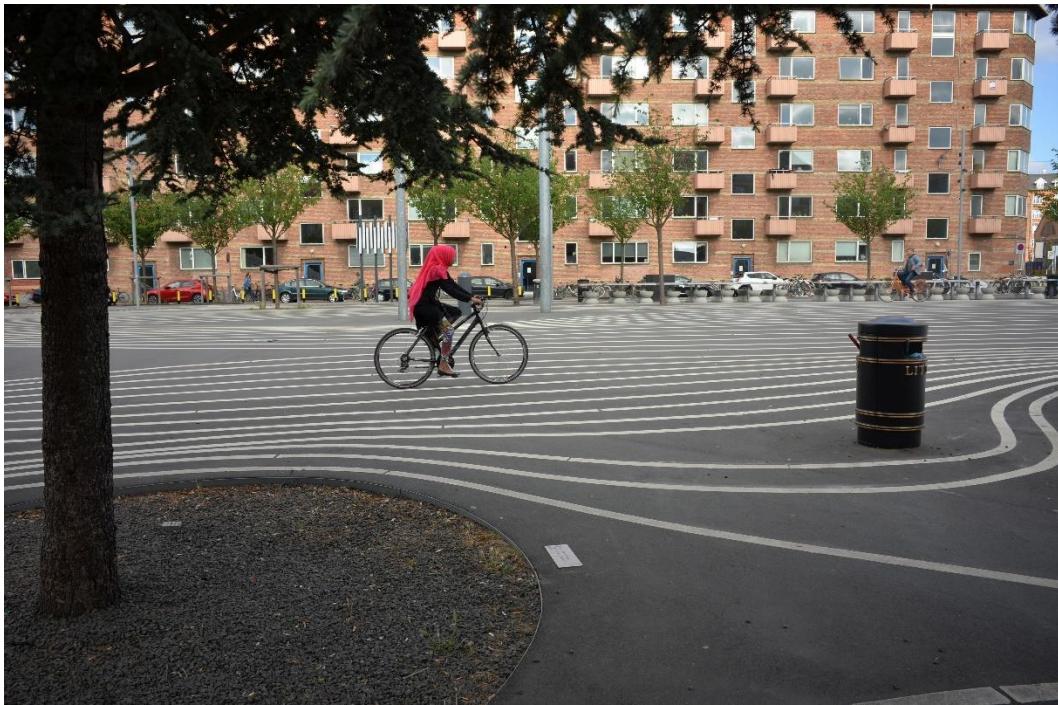


Figure 2: A girl in a neon pink hijab rides her bicycle up and down the asphalt hill at *Superkilen*. Photographs by Michelle Voss.

The young man renting his apartment to me, Magnus Larsen, spoke mainly Danish with limited English and appeared to be a Dane in his late twenties. His enchanting apartment was located in a housing cooperative, Lersøgaard Ejendomskontor, built in 1925. Like many housing cooperatives and private homes in Copenhagen, the building was constructed around a massive courtyard, replete with walking paths, patches of green grass, outdoor tables, and chicken coops. The residents of the building passed many hours in the courtyard—children riding their tricycles, families picnicking on the grass, and young students celebrating with revelry as night falls. If I had not rented this apartment—and, say, stayed in a hotel instead—I would never have had a glimpse of the essential role of communal space in Denmark and how central communal life is to Danish culture.

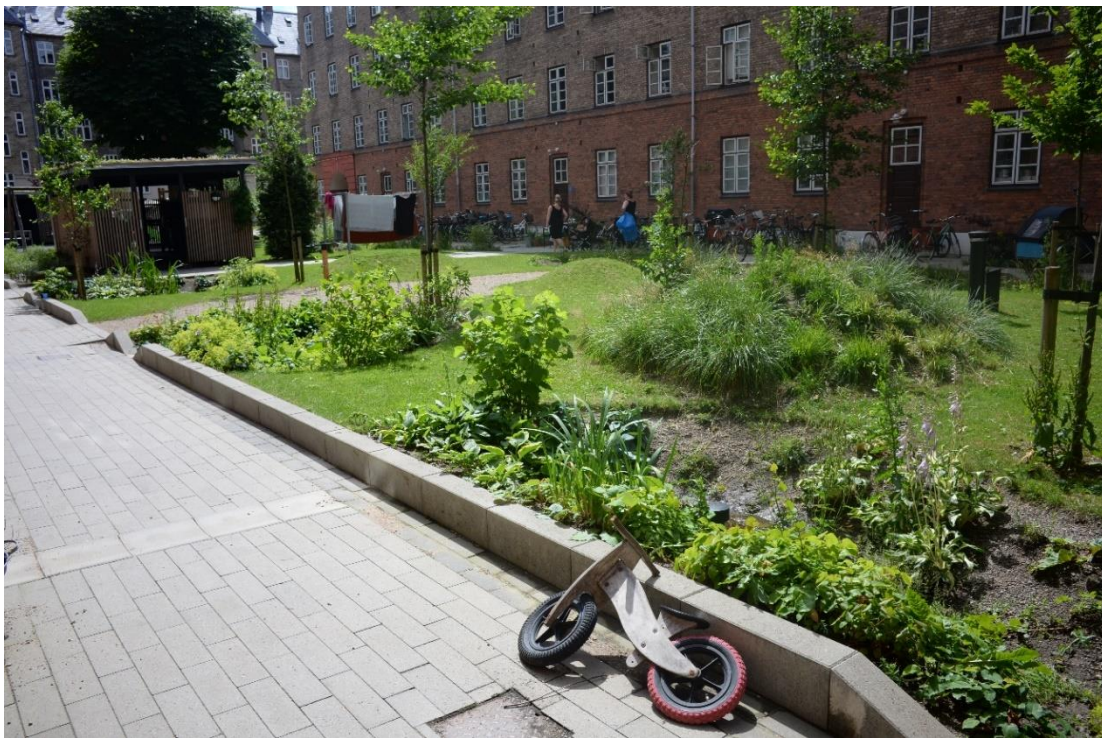


Figure 3: A small slice of the massive courtyard at the Lersøgaard apartment in Nørrebro. Photograph by Michelle Voss.

I deliberately chose to stay in Nørrebro so I could closely observe locals who frequent *Superkilen*, as well as the characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood. Located northwest of the center of Copenhagen, Nørrebro is the most ethnically diverse neighborhood in the city and the multicultural heart of Copenhagen. Nørrebro is truly an amalgam of cultures; local shops with a distinctive Middle Eastern flair sit adjacent to popular Danish chain stores, signifying a thriving neighborhood of immigrants. With a high concentration of people, housing, stores, restaurants, and bars, Nørrebro is lively and unmistakably urban. Public spaces are primarily concrete and asphalt while community greenspace appears infrequently between buildings and roads.

With so many paved areas, I quickly learned that bicycles are the most popular mode of transportation in Copenhagen. Streets and parks have wide bicycle lanes teeming with cyclists spanning every age, race, class, and gender. At all hours of the day, cyclists whiz by in smart outfits on their way to work, school, grocery shopping, or dinner with friends. Naturally, I rented a bike to experience the adventure of navigating Copenhagen, but, as a practical matter, it was the most efficient way to travel around the city. I found a local bicycle shop run by an Italian, who rented me a bright orange bicycle—possibly to forewarn others, as my cycling skills on urban roads were embarrassingly rusty. A couple of days later, Jakob Fenger of SUPERFLEX told me that bicycles are an extension of the each cyclist's personality and people in Copenhagen think of bicycles as a form of self-expression. This insight made my bright orange bicycle seem all the more ridiculous.



Figure 4: The ridiculous bright orange bicycle in repose near the Nyhavn harbor in Copenhagen. Photography by Michelle Voss.

SUPERFLEX IN COPENHAGEN

On a drizzly Tuesday morning, I met Jakob Fenger of SUPERFLEX and his studio Director, Maleana, at the giant Japanese octopus slide at *Superkilen*. We were joined by Louis Grachos, his assistant Stephanie Kingpetcharat, as well as a few members of The Contemporary Austin's Board of Trustees and two staff from Waller Creek Conservancy. Through the misting rain, Jakob gave a tour of the full site, explaining the concept of the park, as well as SUPERFELX's process of working with various community groups.

Jakob has a confident demeanor and a mischievous streak, but he is very approachable and friendly. He listens intently and peppers everything he does with humor. During the tour, I had a few moments for a side conversation with him about the site and

SUPERFLEX's motivations for working on the project. When I asked him why SUPERFLEX often focuses on inequality in their work, he initially quipped, "Like—because of something in my childhood?" But then he got a little more serious and said, "Look around you. It's everywhere." Jakob's comment suggests SUPERFLEX would simply be ignoring reality if they didn't draw attention to inequality through their art.

After the tour of *Superkilen*, Jakob and Maleana invited everyone to visit SUPERFLEX's studio. Jakob and Maleana had traveled to the site on their bicycles, so I hopped on my bicycle and rode with both of them to the studio. Jakob chatted with me nonchalantly during our ride from Nørrebro to SUPERFLEX's studio as I nervously tried to keep up. We discussed bicycle culture in Copenhagen, and we shared a few laughs about my ridiculous orange bike. At the studio, we were joined by the other two artists in SUPERFLEX, Bjørnstjerne Chrisitansen and Rasmus Nielsen, as well as the remainder of the group from the museum, who arrived by a small, private charter bus.

In their conference room, SUPERFLEX shared a slide show of their recent and upcoming projects. With a practice spanning the entire globe, SUPERFLEX described their recent work in the United Arab Emirates, France, Germany, and England. Each project involved engagement of varying scale—sometimes the artists engaged with one person and sometimes the artists engaged with an entire neighborhood—but each project originated from curiosity about people and places. The artists also gave an in-depth explanation of their collaborative process for *Superkilen*.

Each artist discussed one project in-depth, which led me to believe the artists work both collaboratively and independently; in other words, their presentation gave the impression that each member of SUPERFLEX takes the lead on a particular project. A

number of clues—including this presentation, the tour earlier in the morning, published interviews, and awards—cumulatively suggest Jakob was the lead artist on *Superkilen*.

BIG

Bjarke Ingles, the Danish architect involved with *Superkilen*, has become an international sensation in the design world—a “starchitect,” as they say. His dazzling projects are a perfect marriage of ingenuity and playfulness, and his name has become synonymous with imaginative design. His architecture firm, Bjarke Ingles Group—or BIG—operates out of a large warehouse in Copenhagen with projects around the world. A couple of days after my tour of *Superkilen* and SUPERFLEX’s studio, I had the good fortune to join a morning tour of BIG’s office with Louis Grachos and a few members of The Contemporary Austin’s Board of Trustees, as well as two staff from Waller Creek Conservancy.

Upon arriving at BIG’s office, staff immediately informed us that pictures were strictly prohibited inside the building and, at every turn, posted signs remind you of this—almost as if you were visiting a top secret government laboratory. Before this moment, it had never occurred to me that the highly competitive and high-stakes field of architecture hinges on the confidentiality of works in progress. We were offered warm tea since mornings in Copenhagen are chilly—even on a summer day in June—and I was charmed by this civilized and kind gesture.

While we were waiting for Bjarke to arrive to the office, I was approached by Cat Huang—a native Texan from Austin—who was delighted to meet a fellow Texan in the middle of Copenhagen. One of BIG’s first employees, Cat had been a student in Bjarke’s class at Harvard University Graduate School of Design ten years earlier. While at Harvard,

she met her husband—who happens to be Danish, as well—and he also works at BIG. While Cat and I effusively waxed poetic about Texas, I noted I was researching *Superkilen*, and she offered to introduce me to BIG’s lead architect for the project.

When Bjarke arrived, he immediately greeted us and suggested we tour various models of projects, dozens of which sprawled across large tables in between rows of architects and designers transfixed on large computer screens. Bjarke has a distinctive, charismatic aura about him that can best be described as raw genius. Every gesture sparks with wild imagination and—even though it is clear he has carefully rehearsed many of his thoughts about his projects—he possesses a captivating intensity.

Bjarke started our tour with one of his residential building projects, a pyramid-like structure in New York City, and touched on his upcoming work on the New York City Dryline, a ten-mile waterfront park designed to prevent flooding. Next, he showed us plans for a waste-to-energy plant in Copenhagen with a roof that will double as a ski slope. The project is an ambitious blend of zero waste energy production and, of all things, pleasure—a concept Bjarke terms, “Hedonistic Sustainability.” Lastly, Bjarke showed us the model for a failed proposal for a school. It was a fascinating design with fluid textures and large open spaces for natural light. Bjarke was clearly disappointed they did not win the project. When I asked him, “What did win?” He wryly replied, “An evil box.”

After our tour with Bjarke, Cat introduced me to Nanna Gyldholm Møller, a Senior Architect at BIG. Before my trip, I had emailed Nanna about my research project since her name had often appeared in various texts written about *Superkilen*. While I did not hear back from Nanna before my trip, Cat’s introduction jogged Nanna’s memory and she promised to reply via email. It was very interesting that my initial inquiry via email was not as compelling as a visit in person; I think meeting the actual person behind the digital

message caught her off guard a little bit. Moments after departing BIG, I received an email in my inbox from Nanna, kindly offering to review my questions.

SUPERKILEN

In addition to meeting SUPERFLEX and Bjarke Ingles, I had a number of days to observe *Superkilen*. My proximity to the site in the apartment on Midgårdsgade was invaluable for observing how different types of people engage with *Superkilen* throughout the day. From dawn until midnight, families, teenagers, athletes, students, and cyclists would gather, play, and socialize. On one occasion, there was a boisterous crowd surrounding a large-scale performance with acrobats and thundering music; according to SUPERFLEX, these type of free events frequently enliven the space.

I was very interested in speaking with residents and shop owners about their opinions of the site. As a key feature of my research, it was essential for me to interview individuals before traveling back to Texas. Towards the beginning of my stay, I walked over to Hijab Hus and asked an employee if she would be available to speak with me about *Superkilen*, but she politely declined. That same day, I noticed a stylish young woman in the stairs of the apartment on Midgårdsgade, and I approached her to see if she might be interested in speaking with me about the site. Through somewhat broken English, she also politely declined, indicating she was heading to the Roskilde Festival, one of the largest music festivals in Europe. I also approached a group of teenage girls sitting on the giant red swings in the red square, but when I asked them to speak with me about the park, they indicated they lived far away and rarely visited the site. Then, the manager of the apartments on Midgårdsgade never returned my call or my email about my interview request, and I was beginning to get nervous that no one would speak with me.

While walking through *Superkilen*, I often noticed a large building with the word “Nørrebrohallen” in bold red letters above the entrance. One afternoon, I decided to investigate the space to see what was inside. Upon entering, I could hear the echoes of squeaking sneakers and bouncing balls, and I noticed a large basketball court behind glass on one side of the building. The large, open lobby was two stories, and people milled about on both floors, most dressed for exercise. From what I could gather, the space was the equivalent of a YMCA in the United States.

I walked up to the front desk and asked the man behind the counter if I could talk to someone about *Superkilen*. He gestured toward another man sitting at his desk and asked him to come over. When he arrived, I told him I was researching *Superkilen* for The University of Texas, which seemed to pique his interest, and I gave him my card. The man introduced himself as Besar Rakipi and indicated he was the manager of Nørrebrohallen. I asked him if I could interview him about *Superkilen*, and he said he would be happy to speak with me—but he did not have time at that moment. He probably noticed the panic on my face—I was leaving Copenhagen in two days, and I was nervous I would miss the opportunity to speak with him. He said he could arrange for me to come back the next day, when we could speak at length.

When I returned the next day, Besar was ready at our planned time, and he had reserved a quiet space for our interview. We spoke for an hour, and I recorded the conversation on a digital recorder. As it turns out, Besar had been working at Nørrebrohallen for eighteen years. An immigrant, Besar came to Denmark from Macedonia over thirty years ago. During that time, he had observed the transition of the Nørrebro neighborhood, and he was actively involved in the designing and planning of *Superkilen*. When we were done speaking, we went to his desk so he could find some

historical photographs of the site, which he emailed to me, and he also gave me a gigantic, full-color, one-hundred-and-seventy-page bound copy of the design plans for *Superkilen*. “I thought maybe you could have it as a souvenir,” he said. I was completely astonished at my luck and his kindness—I just happened to walk into Nørrebrohallen during his shift, and his thoughtful interview turned out to be the most insightful and valuable research of my trip.



Figure 5: Besar at his desk in Nørrebrohallen. Photograph by Michelle Voss.

With time running out, I decided to sit and linger at *Superkilen* one afternoon to find people to interview about the site. It was a bright, sunny day, and a diverse group of

families were gathered near the fountain and the giant octopus slide. I approached two women sitting at a picnic table—one was wearing a hijab and one had on large sunglasses but she did not have on a hijab. I inquired if I could ask them a few questions about the park, and they enthusiastically agreed. Both women—Dalal Hachache and Hitaf Abdullatif—were immigrants from Lebanon, and had lived in Denmark for a number of years. They frequently visited *Superkilen* with their children and enjoyed the chance to visit with each other while their children played.

While I was interviewing the women, a mother of two young children, Johanna Hood, overheard us talking, and she was happy to offer her perspective, as well. Originally a Canadian, she had immigrated with her young family to Denmark to teach at Roskilde University where she is an Associate Professor of International Development. She lived about a fifteen-minute bike ride away from *Superkilen*, and she visited the site with her children occasionally. Her young daughter was riding her scooter around the site, and she was enjoying riding up and down the giant asphalt hill during our conversation. I recorded both of these conversations with a digital recorder with each individual's permission, and, with the insights of the women I was able to speak to, I had gathered enough material to review for my research.

BREXIT

During my stay in Denmark, I had the opportunity to visit the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art on two separate occasions. Perched on a seaside cliff with spectacular views, the museum is about a forty-five-minute train ride from Copenhagen. In addition to a magnificent sculpture park, the property features a historic home, as well as extensive galleries of modern and contemporary art. On my first trip, I was fortunate to be traveling

with Louis Grachos and members of The Contemporary Austin's Board of Trustees, so I had the privilege of having lunch with Michael Juul Holm, Curator for publications at the Louisiana. While this may seem somewhat ancillary to my research for *Superkilen*, I felt it was important to note my conversation with Michael.

At the time I was visiting Denmark, England was voting on whether or not to exit the European Union, a referendum that had taken on the moniker "Brexit" in the press—a portmanteau of Britain and exit. A complex and divisive issue, Brexit symbolized a tangled web of contemporary sociopolitical problems, such as immigration, employment, and national identity. In our very candid conversation during lunch, Michael was lamenting England's decision to take this important issue to a vote. Taking a serious tone, he expressed his concern that Denmark would be the only Northern European country left in the European Union and, feeling the two nations needed to show solidarity, he was strongly opposed to England leaving the union.

Later that day, England voted to leave the European Union. Observers of the vote noted the influence of far-right political groups in the outcome of the referendum, particularly anti-immigrant sentiments among white voters in England. The Brexit vote was a signal of far-right influence sweeping across Western democracies, including France's National Front, Denmark's National Front, and the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States in November 2016. Among all of these examples, nationalist discourse, and anti-Muslim rhetoric in particular, played a central role in stoking public fears about immigrants. It was in this climate that I was researching *Superkilen*, and, as a public space designed for immigrants in the surrounding neighborhood, the anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant rhetoric was foremost on many people's minds during my interviews about the site.

SUMMARY

To illustrate my experience researching *Superkilen* in Copenhagen, this chapter provided a narrative account of my stay in Nørrebro, as well as a description of my encounters with community members who live and work near the site, the artists of SUPERFLEX, and the architects at BIG's office. The following chapter investigates how *Superkilen* demonstrates the process of creating socially engaged art through analysis of interviews with a number of individuals, including Jakob Fenger and Rasmus Nielsen of SUPERFLEX; Bjarke Ingles of BIG; Nanna Gyldholm Møller, Senior Architect at BIG; Besar Rakipi, Manager of Nørrebrohallen; and, everyday users of *Superkilen*.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

To further understand how *Superkilen* illustrates the process of creating a socially engaged work of art, I analyzed multiple forms of data collected during my research trip to Denmark. I examined transcripts of my interviews with Besar Rakipi—the manager of Nørrebrohallen—and everyday users of the site. I also examined my field notes collected during tours with SUPERFLEX—both at *Superkilen* and in their studio—and with Bjarke Ingles at BIG’s studio, as well as emails from Nanna Gyldholm Møller, Senior Architect at BIG. To supplement my interviews, emails, and field notes, I referenced original design documents for *Superkilen*, historical images of Nørrebro, and photographs I captured during my research in Copenhagen, as well as a compendium of the stories behind all 108 objects at the site compiled by SUPERFLEX. After conducting analysis of interview transcripts, field notes, design documents, object stories, and photographs, significant ideas emerged around the following five themes: (a) metamorphosis; (b) participation; (c) identity; (d) material culture; and, (e) play. I expand on these themes in greater detail below, illustrating each point with quotes directly drawn from my research in Denmark.

THEME 1: METAMORPHOSIS

The first time I met Besar Rakipi at Nørrebrohallen, I asked him what he thought about *Superkilen*. Without hesitation, he blurted out, “I love it, and I hate it” (personal communication, June 2016). Besar’s conflicted response underscores the challenges cities face when reimagining urban space, particularly the friction between old and new. As Bjarke Ingles noted during our tour of BIG’s studio, *Superkilen* requires “spatial interaction with the historical Copenhagen landscape,” enmeshing the contemporary design into the existing architecture and culture (personal communication, June 2016). Comparing the

historical photograph of Nørrebro in Figure 6 with the contemporary image of the *Superkilen* site in Figure 7, the colorful elements bursting with life at *Superkilen*—a hallmark of the site’s design—integrate with the surrounding buildings as though a painter used them as a canvas. The historic structures are almost identical in both photographs, indicating the design of *Superkilen* allows room for continuity while introducing bold playscapes, surfaces, and objects reflecting our current times. Originally the site for the City of Copenhagen’s trolley train depot, traces of this industrial past remain in Nørrebro. Most notably, the warehouse for the trolley maintenance bays has been converted into Nørrebrohallen, a community sports complex. Through the sum of these parts, the revitalization of Nørrebro reflects the observable phenomenon of urban environments morphing organically over time, much like an ecosystem adapting to the fluctuating and fleeting forces of nature.

Superkilen evolved over the course of five years, and the metamorphosis of the site required the community to accept change, though many people I spoke with felt the changes in Nørrebro have been largely positive and that *Superkilen* is a marker of this progress. In decades past, Nørrebro had a reputation for being dangerous; today, the area has emerged as an attractive neighborhood for many Danes. During our tour of *Superkilen*, Maleana Ratcliffe, the Studio Director for SUPERFLEX, commented: “Twenty years ago—you didn’t go there, but I live close by now” (personal communication, June 2016). SUPERFLEX’s studio is also located in Nørrebro, suggesting the area now appeals to creatives and artists, a frequent signal of a transitioning urban neighborhood.



Figure 6: Historical image of Nørrebro pre-*Superkilen*, circa the 1970s. Photograph courtesy Besar Rakipi.



Figure 7: Contemporary image of Nørrebro for a similar vantage point, June 2016. Photograph by Michelle Voss.

During my conversation with Dalal Hachache and Hitaf Abdullatif one afternoon at *Superkilen*, the two women gave me insights into the community perspectives on the changes made to the space. Hitaf found the area unappealing before *Superkilen*, commenting, “Never interesting to come. The kids don't want to be here” (personal communication, 2016). Dalal concurred, “It was no special with this place before” (personal communication, June 2016). After the improvements to the site and, particularly, the new amenities added through *Superkilen*, the community embraced the park. Hitaf remarked the site is now “Very, very beautiful. I think it's very nice. Many of the family come here and enjoy the time with their kids” (personal communication, June 2016). Hitaf’s opinion echoes Maleana’s comment about currently living nearby after once feeling trepidatious about Nørrebro; the transformation of the site into *Superkilen* has made the area more family-friendly. In this regard, the site acts as a beacon of change, inviting the community to engage with the space and the surrounding neighborhood.

THEME 2: PARTICIPATION

As socially engaged artists, SUPERFLEX frequently collaborates with communities to create new works of art. To realize *Superkilen*, SUPERFLEX embedded themselves into various subgroups in Nørrebro and even travelled internationally with the groups, launching the basic idea of collaboration into another stratosphere. SUPERFLEX terms this collaboration on steroids *participation extreme*. On our tour of *Superkilen* and SUPERFLEX’s studio, Jakob Fenger elaborated on the concept. Comparing their idea of *participation extreme* to extreme makeover television shows, Jakob joked the project “mixed the idea of extreme makeover and city council” (personal communication, June 2016). Just like extreme makeover television shows, they went to different groups and

asked a simple question: What do you want from a park? SUPERFLEX even went so far as to travel to international destinations with five different groups to select objects for the site.

Apparently, this unusual approach irritated city bureaucrats, as Jakob related: “The city council came after us and said, ‘This isn’t a democratic way of doing things’” (personal communication, June 2016). Pushing back against the Copenhagen city council, Jakob argued, “If you went through the democratic process, you wouldn’t get a sound system from Jamaica” (personal communication, June 2016). Rasmus Nielsen agreed: “We never would have thought of an octopus or a bull” (personal communication, June 2016). Jakob surmised the city council, so accustomed to being in control, felt invisible and excluded: “I think they felt overlooked, the white middle-aged men” (personal communication, June 2016). Including a diverse mix of groups in the planning process elicited fresh and exciting ideas, as Jakob noted: “When we went to talk to the kids about what they wanted—it was a completely different take” (personal communication, June 2016). Ultimately, Jakob concluded, it would be a very different park “if we talked to people just like us” (personal communication, June 2016).

By prioritizing user participation, SUPERFLEX’S concept of *participation extreme* neutralizes institutional privilege and overcomes the power imbalance of traditional community engagement strategies. Jakob pointed out that their process at *Superkilen* encountered resistance since it was “the first time that’s not the official way to do it,” adding that, inherently, “it is more demanding” (personal communication, June 2016). This ambitious plan to engage the public also required the project team to use creative strategies for user participation. Nanna Gyldholm Møller, the Senior Architect who shepherded *Superkilen* for BIG, explained via email: “All users and ideas were welcome.

It was the first time for us to orchestrate such a big user participation, so we had to invent our own way of doing it” (personal communication, June 2016). Portions of the team’s approach resembled community organizing. According to Nanna, “We made a physical mailbox where people could post ideas, we made a webpage where you could read about the project and email ideas to, we had ads [sic] in the local newspaper and we invited to meeting in the neighborhood” (personal communication, July 2016).

Inviting broad user participation not only required the project team to exert extra effort to collect opinions and feedback, this unique process also opened up a geyser of endless possibilities for the site’s design, which eventually had to be contained. As Nanna asserted: “The main challenges were to navigate through the users wishes and to integrate them into the project in the best way” (personal communication, June 2016). At turns, the project team had to demonstrate the potential pitfalls of ideas that were simply not viable. Nanna indicated “one of the biggest challenges were [sic] to convince the users that they did not need a big green lawn, but more paved multifunctional areas” (personal communication, July 2016). During our interview, Besar, who was on the *Superkilen* advisory board, acknowledged the initial community dissatisfaction with the extensive paved areas incorporated into BIG’s design: “There were three or four good projects, but the people in Nørrebro didn’t want *Superkilen*. They wanted another project which featured more green areas and water features” (personal communication, June 2016).

In the final calculus, the project team at BIG had to rely on their expertise in the field of architecture and urban planning to make some of the most crucial decisions for the design, as Nanna clearly illustrated: “There is very hard use of the urban spaces in this area . . . the green lawn would have been transformed into a mud puddle after the first big event on the square or after the first heavy rain fall” (personal communication, July 2016).

Nanna's experience sorting out design problems conveys the limitations of user participation. While SUPERLFEX and BIG were committed to the extra work involved with facilitating user participation, there were realistic limits for just how far user participation could extend. In the end, the project team struck a balance between the user's wishes and the practical constraints of the site.

THEME 3: IDENTITY

Throughout my research, a common thread in interviews was the importance of expressing and preserving identity—in all its messy, complex, entangled forms—particularly in relationship to the urban context of Nørrebro and *Superkilen*. At the end of Chapter 3, I briefly touched on the “Brexit” vote and the virulent strain of anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim rhetoric sweeping across Europe—and the Western world—in 2016. During our tour of *Superkilen* and SUPERFLEX's studio, Jakob acknowledged this atmosphere, frankly commenting, “There's been a lot of tension for migrants in Europe” (personal communication, June 2016). In our interview, Besar, an immigrant to Denmark from Macedonia, expressed his frustration at the ongoing discord over immigration:

The Danish National Party, the right one, is just getting more and more votes, and is getting more and more powerful, and I'm tired of hearing the immigration debate. The ‘foreigners’—every time you're watching the news, there's always something about [it]. . . People see you more and more . . . They don't see you as a Dane, even though I've been living here for 30 years. I share the Danish values with them, but I'm still not a Dane. Even though when I go see the Danish soccer team, I get goosebumps when we sing the national anthem, but it's still not enough. Sometimes, I feel like maybe I should be in Macedonia. (personal communication, June 2016)

While speaking with me at *Superkilen*, Hitaf emphasized that many Danes believe the negative stories about Muslims in the media:

They will believe that everything coming from media is true. It's not true. Because not all Muslim is terrorist, and not all Muslim is extremes. We can be everything, and we can work on everything. So maybe they should learn some Muslim and they change their mind. (personal communication, June 2016)

Responding to Hitaf's remarks, Dalal chimed in: "We are different, but we can work together. We can have friend together. We can be together." Continuing her thoughts, Dalal expressed people have more in common than they realize: "It's okay to have some international from many countries, and we are not different of other." Hitaf noted she feels comfortable coming to *Superkilen* since there is a high concentration of Muslims: "Very much of Muslim live in here, so it's more open and we don't feel anything so where we are special" (personal communication, June 2016). This result—making Muslims feel more comfortable at *Superkilen*—was, in fact, by design.

To give a narrative framework to the site, SUPERFLEX devised the concept to incorporate the identities of the people living in Nørrebro into the design of the site. When touring *Superkilen*, Jakob explained the project is akin to "the United Nations building in New York—you can see all the nationalities from the outside" (personal communication, June 2016). Via email, Nanna described how SUPERFLEX kept the project team at BIG focused on this concept: "I think the collaboration with SUPERFLEX was like a happy marriage. They have a very conceptual approach to what they do like we do. They helped keeping the entire teams focus on the main concept; the World Exhibition" (personal communication, June 2016). Besar conjectured SUPERFLEX's concept was the reason why BIG's design was selected for the site:

The city council liked the project because of the concept about the 53 nationalities living in Nørrebro . . . It has a storytelling, while the other was maybe a lot of green, and it was nice area, with green trees, and water elements for the children, but it didn't have that storytelling about the project. I think that's why the city council chose *Superkilen*, and I also think it's a good story to take 53 objects at *Superkilen*,

which comes for each nationality that lives in Nørrebro. (personal communication, June 2016)



Figure 8: The front and back cover of the original design documents for *Superkilen* featuring flags from the spectrum of nationalities represented at the site.

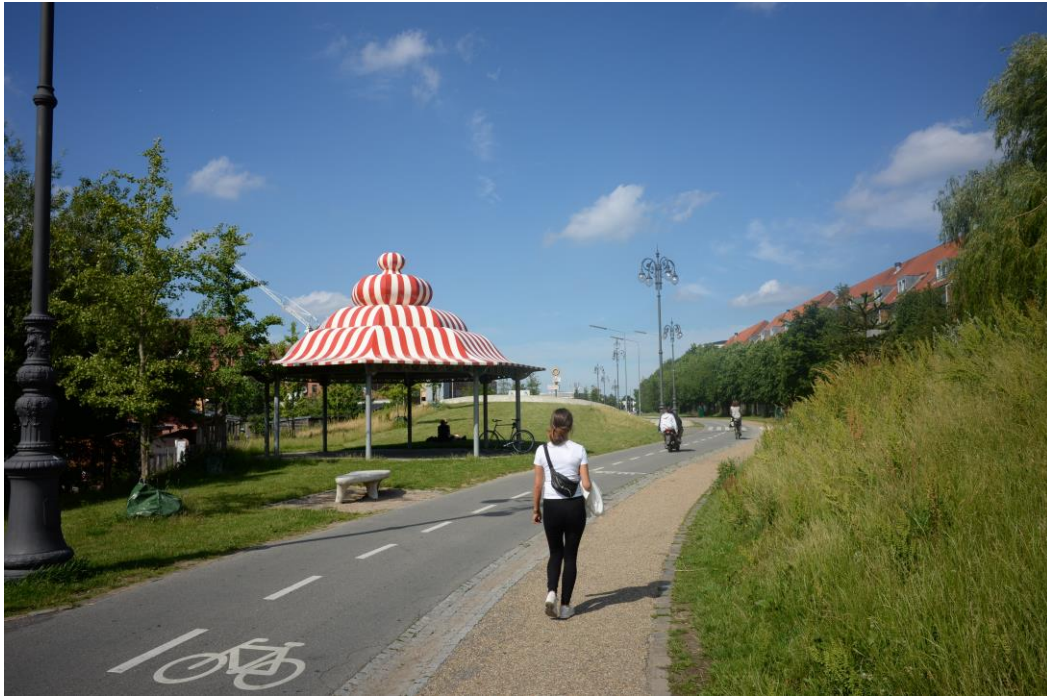


Figure 9: The replica of a Russian dancing pavilion from St. Louis, Missouri installed at *Superkilen*. Photograph by Michelle Voss.

The layered complexity of national identity is perfectly illustrated in the story behind a dancing pavilion selected for installation at *Superkilen*. SUPERFLEX traveled with a line-dancing group from Denmark to the United States to look for a dancing pavilion to install at the site. During a road trip from San Antonio, Texas to St. Louis, Missouri, the Danish line-dancing group chose a dancing pavilion based on a Russian design. While on our tour of *Superkilen*, Jakob relayed how one of the women in the line-dancing group was surprised to learn the story of the Russian dancing pavilion in Missouri: “She didn’t understand the United States was full of migrants” (personal communication, June 2016). In a somewhat humorous twist, a dancing pavilion brought to the United States by Russian immigrants was copied to a Danish park in the middle of Nørrebro, a neighborhood of immigrants. This anecdote illuminates the universal story of immigration around the globe and highlights the interconnectedness of national identities across continents.

Jakob commented that the ultimate goal of incorporating all of these national identities into the fabric of *Superkilen* is to “accept that people are from different places” (personal communication, June 2016). Nanna believes they’ve achieved success on this score:

It’s fantastic to see how people from very different cultural or social background meet at *Superkilen*; around the fountain when their kids are playing at the octopus, on one of the many benches around the area or while training in the muscle beach or using the outdoor fitness area. For me that was the main goal, to make people interact and meet and then of course the massive amount of people using it every day. (personal communication, June 2016)

The sheer number of people flocking to the site also signals the concept resonates with the community and with visitors from around the world—all while capturing the immigrant spirit of Nørrebro. Contemplating *Superkilen’s* worldwide fame, Besar marveled:

I don't know how many organizations that has been here to get a tour of the *Superkilen*, and sometimes, I think, come on, this isn't the pyramids. Why is somebody coming to see it? And it's good because the whole *Superkilen*, you get so many different people to use it, it's all from the skaters, to the families with children, foreigners, the pasteling people, so you get a lot of groups. That's fascinating to see how many groups there can be out there at the *Superkilen* without any conflicts. That's why it's really Nørrebro. It really says what Nørrebro is about. (personal communication, June 2016)

THEME 4: MATERIAL CULTURE

While touring BIG’s studio, Bjarke Ingles reflected on the city of Copenhagen’s aspirations for *Superkilen*: “It turns out it was about ownership. How do you give almost sixty nationalities ownership?” (personal communication, June 2016). To answer this question, SUPERFLEX asked local residents to nominate specific urban objects

encountered in either their country of national origin or in their travels abroad, including benches, bins, trees, playgrounds, manhole covers, and signage, in order to give residents in Nørrebro ownership of the site. The nominated objects were either produced as a 1:1 scale copy or purchased and transported to *Superkilen*, a process Jakob describes as a “copy paste concept” (personal communication, June 2016). Bjarke compared these objects at the site to a “historical artifact inserted into a museum” (personal communication, June 2016). With more than 108 objects of material culture installed at the site, *Superkilen* inhabits a space between the intersection of art and anthropology.

What seems like a straightforward concept was not without complications. Rasmus Nielsen of SUPERFLEX related: “Architects tell us it’s a very dirt cheap park”; however, the site can be “more complex to maintain” (personal communication, June 2016). Apparently, it can be challenging for the city of Copenhagen to understand the objects at the site are works of art requiring special maintenance and care. For example, city workers were planning to replace a worn-out bench with a city of Copenhagen bench, but Jakob intervened: “I was like—no, no! Don’t replace it! Just paint it” (personal communication, June 2016). Likewise, Nanna described how time-consuming it was for BIG’s office to create drawings for dozens of objects at the site:

It would have made our life a lot easier to just pick one type of bench or one type of lamp and not have to draw and redesign all these (around 120 different) object so that they were fitting in under the Danish playground regulations, etc. . . but it was worth all of it! (personal communication, July 2016)

The unusual objects have also been the source of comical moments, as Besar illustrated with his exchange with a confused visitor to Nørrebrohallen:

We had one who came in, "Where is that donuts store?"

I said, "What?"

"The donut store."

"Why do you think there's a donut store here?"

"But I saw a sign at *Superkilen*, and I'm going and going. I can't see the donut store."

"No, there isn't any donut store here, because you see the sign."

They've been walking, they always come all the way down here.

"It has to be in here now."

"Why do you think there's a donut store in here?"

So, that's funny. (personal communication, June 2016)

To further shape the narrative framework for the site, SUPERFLEX investigated the history of each object at the site and collected these origin stories in an index of all 108 objects at *Superkilen*. Each story offers a rich tableau of the country of origin for the object and the purpose behind the original design of the object. SUPERFLEX also designed an app for *Superkilen* with these same histories, which is available for download to smart phones. Most strikingly, SUPERFLEX traveled to international destinations with five different groups to gather five specific objects for the site: a sound system from Jamaica; a dancing pavilion from Missouri; soil from Palestine; a giant silhouette of a bull from Spain; and, a boxing ring from Thailand. The story of SUPERFLEX's relationship with these groups adds an entirely new layer of meaning to each of these five objects. More pointedly, SUPERFLEX elevated the stories of community members who may have been overlooked on a standard public works project.



Figure 11: A scanned page from the design documents for *Superkilen* with an image of the original swing from Iraq with an American soldier sitting across from an Iraqi girl.

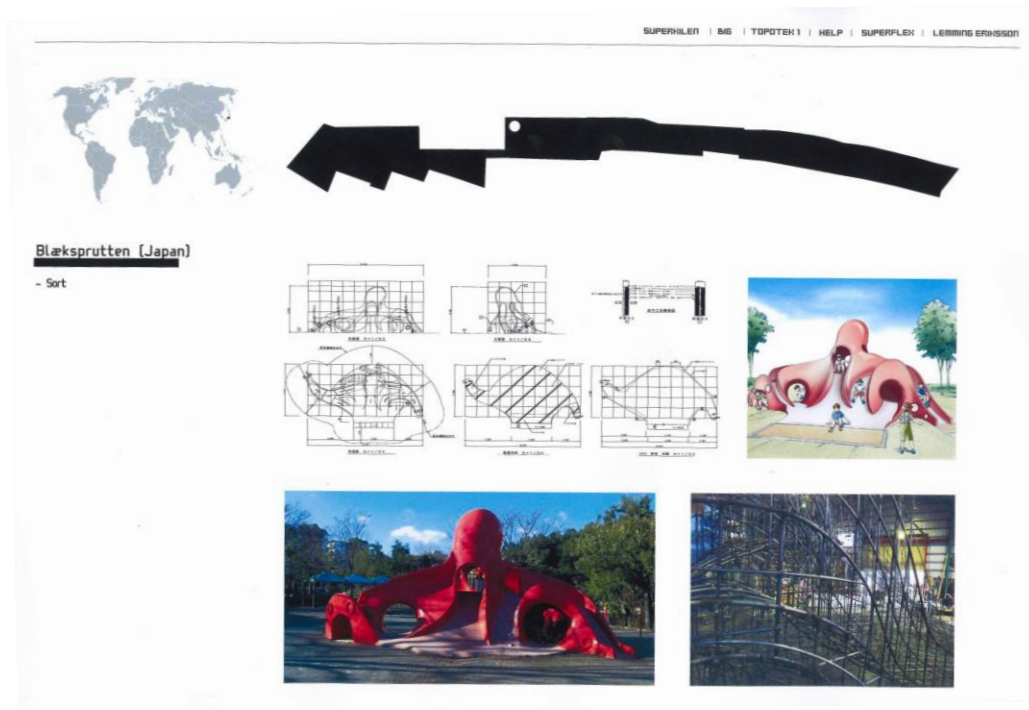


Figure 12: A scanned page from the design documents for *Superkilen* with an image of the original octopus slide from Japan.



Figure 13: The famous dentist sign from Qatar as viewed from atop the iconic black asphalt hill at *Superkilen* during the day and the night. Photographs by Michelle Voss.

THEME 5: PLAY

An experiential public space, *Superkilen* is an open invitation to the community to activate the site. During our tour of SUPERFLEX’s studio, Rasmus referred to *Superkilen* as “a piece of architecture you experience in pure form, and you can dive into the experience. Hopefully, this works on a viral level—people involve their families and friends” (personal communication, June 2016). Maleana Ratcliffe, the Studio Director for SUPERFLEX, echoed this sentiment with her comment on our tour of the site: “People make it their own. It’s out of this world for Copenhagen. It asks people, ‘Please stop by and play’” (personal communication, June 2016).



Figure 14: A diverse group of community members play in the Moroccan fountain at *Superkilen*. Photograph by Michelle Voss.



Figure 15: Dalal Hachache (left) and Hitaf Abdullatif (right) enjoy *Superkilen* while Dalal's children play. Photograph by Michelle Voss.

With a strong correlation to play, *Superkilen* has become a fixture in the daily lives of community members. Dalal's children refer to the park as "the black octopus," and beg to come every day to play for one-to-two hours: "She ask me every day, 'Mama, can we go to the park?' Sometimes my mom comes and we can sit like this and talk and the kids play" (personal communication, June 2016). Similarly, Johanna Hood, a university professor originally from Canada, frequents *Superkilen* with her children. In conversation with me, she indicated her family shared the same association with the site:

Johanna: The octopus we know. I don't know if that's supposed to be an octopus.

Michelle: It is.

Johanna: It is? OK. 'Cause that's how we talk about the park. It's the octopus park. (personal communication, 2016).



Figure 16: The black octopus slide, which has become synonymous with *Superkilen* for many community members. Photograph by Michelle Voss.

As these quotes from everyday users of the site illustrate, the octopus slide has become synonymous with *Superkilen* in the public's imagination. The origins of the black octopus slide are detailed in the index of each object and its story from the SUPERFLEX website, *Superkilen: Superkilen's 108 Objects and Their History*:

The original playground octopus has its home in Kitashikahama Park in a suburb of Tokyo, the Japanese capital. It has a number of orifices, slides, and the option to crawl over or under various obstacles. During the construction process the City of Copenhagen received a Christmas card from Futaba Public Nursery School, a kindergarten near the octopus in Tokyo. The children had been discussing the Danish copy and were asking e.g. whether Danish children play in the same way they do. They enclosed a number of octopus-inspired drawings and a photo of themselves on their own octopus in Japan. (p. 16)

Much as the young children in Japan were curious about whether children around the world play the same, the symbolic association of the black octopus slide with *Superkilen* suggests the impulse to play is universal. BIG's design and SUPERFLEX's objects combine to create a public park bursting with life, giving users an experience that is both kinetic and emotional. Community members gather at *Superkilen* to fulfill this drive for fun and excitement. During our conversation at *Superkilen*, Johanna's daughter interrupted us momentarily to notify her mother she was seeking adventure:

Johanna's daughter: "Mom, do you know somewhere where it's really steep and I can skate?"

Johanna: "You know what? This is the biggest hill that I know. I don't think we can find a steeper hill for you."

Johanna's daughter: "I want to blast off and see where the lines will take me."
(personal communication, 2016)

Since the park opened in 2013, the community's response to *Superkilen* has been so enthusiastic that the site is now showing serious signs of wear and tear. Besar lamented that *Superkilen* was rapidly deteriorating, but he acknowledged this is largely due to the popularity of the site:

I hate it because if you go outside now, it's only three years old, and it looks like it has its status for 50 years. It looks tramped and trashed, and that's why I hate it. And I hate it because I still miss a green area. It's a large ramp. It's asphalt that would hold everything. That's why, and I love it because people just love it.
(personal communication, June 2016).

Jakob explains how this public space has taken on significance as a site for the community to play: "People are using the park to promote their own culture. They take the park as hostage for different things. This is not a museum. This is a park" (personal communication, June 2016). Since SUPERFLEX engaged a wide range of age groups to select objects for the site—from teenagers to the elderly—the park offers multiple points

of entry for activation. From fitness fanatics and skaters to cyclists and walking groups, the park offers something for everyone at every stage of life.



Figure 17: Community members “take the park as hostage” for a live acrobatics showcase at *Superkilen* in June 2016. Photograph by Michelle Voss.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This study explored the central research question: how does *Superkilen* demonstrate the process of creating socially engaged art? Through engagement with the literature, research in Copenhagen, and analysis of data collected from field work, this study examined how SUPERFLEX engaged with community members in order to shape the vision for *Superkilen* and invite user participation in the ethnically diverse neighborhood of Nørrebro. The previous chapter outlined significant ideas that emerged from this research around the following five themes: (a) metamorphosis; (b) participation; (c) identity; (d) material culture; and, (e) play. Building on these ideas, this final chapter teases out the essential concepts underpinning the creation of socially engaged art for public spaces and applies these concepts to the field of art education. Specifically, three important areas are noteworthy for discussion: (a) the co-creation of art; (b) critical spatial practice; and, (c) the activation of the social dimension in works of art.

THE CO-CREATION OF ART

As a collective of three artists, SUPERFLEX regularly negotiates amongst each other; this reciprocity consistently translates into their artistic process. With a diverse and complex practice spanning the globe, SUPERFLEX has created projects in collaboration with communities in Africa, Brazil, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Japan, North Korea, and the United Arab Emirates. SUPERFLEX approaches each project with flexibility, inviting people to participate in the development of experimental models to create collaborative works unique to the needs of their respective communities.

Rirkrit Tiravanija, a contemporary artist who frequently creates projects with strong components of social engagement, comments on the collaborative workflow of SUPERLFLEX:

I think the reason they are who they are is probably because they are able to let different ideas flow together. It's not like they all have to agree. I think they are able to work because they are able to understand the difference, and within that difference there is a more important thing that they should be focusing on. (Hyslop, 2018, p. 20)

Tiravanija underscores perhaps the most essential ingredient in both SUPERFLEX's practice and the practice of socially engaged art: understanding difference. Starting from a neutral position, SUPERFLEX is able to adapt and respond to disparate and divergent perspectives. Nils Stærk, the owner of Nils Stærk Gallery in Copenhagen, represents SUPERFLEX on numerous international projects. Here, Nils gives insight into this fluidity:

We began working with SUPERFLEX around 2003. I was very fascinated by the SUPERFLEX group practice and the way they could have a practice that is critical to many crucial topics of our society without dictating a specific point of view. That is something I still admire in their work. (Hyslop, 2018, p. 21)

Indeed, SUPERFLEX challenges the very role of artists in contemporary society. The group certainly considers the aesthetics of art and design in their practice, but they continue to reinvent their purpose as artists with each new project. Open to possibility, SUPERFLEX is not constrained by traditional boundaries for art and artmaking. Regarding *Superkilen*, Jakob Fenger explains the organic evolution of their role on the project:

Our role was not very clearly defined and I think this was really important. Now we know what our role was, but in the beginning it was difficult for us to say what exactly it would be: we did not do the drawings, we did not calculate how long a swing would last, those kinds of things. It might fit very well into this that we did not have a contract. We had to carve out space for ourselves within the bigger picture of the project. It would not have been possible within the usual frames . . . There was no space for us artists. So, we had to convince the team that we should be there, and we should be around, and we should keep tracking the concepts, and we should play a very strong role in the selection of the objects – but without even having a contract. BIG gets an invoice from us every month. (Hyslop, 2018, p. 50)

For the field of art education, SUPERFLEX's fluid and flexible approach can have numerous practical applications. To start, giving students a broader understanding of the purpose and value of artists in contemporary society can unlock new possibilities for their own practice. Further, cultivating openness—to new concepts, to interdisciplinary collaborations, and to sites outside of gallery walls—expands the field of art education to new territories. Looking at the full body of work created by SUPERFLEX, some projects may not have been very successful—in fact, some may have even been failures. But failure offers a valuable space for reflection and reinvention. Incorporating room for failure into lessons on the co-creation of art can make social practice more approachable for both educators and students.

CRITICAL SPATIAL PRACTICE

Superkilen serves as a prototype for the intersection of art, architecture, and culture, colliding to form a critique of contemporary life. More pointedly, *Superkilen* is a striking example of how public space can be renegotiated in the urban context, or what is termed critical spatial practice. From an ontological perspective, numerous elements combine to influence how we perceive and experience space. Within urban infrastructure, spatial cues

define how people relate to the built environment. In *Meaning in the Urban Environment*, Martin Krampen (2007) explores how signs, symbols, and images all combine to create nonverbal cues that assign ownership to urban spaces. Looking at urbanization as a process of communication raises an important question: how do people create meaning in the urban context?

At *Superkilen*, SUPERFLEX and BIG answered this question by mining the immigrant experience through the installation of more than 100 objects of material culture at the site. Deliberately embedding traces of immigrant culture into the design of the *Superkilen* gave the community in Nørrebro ownership of the site, as “the routines and everyday habits of immigrant culture can emerge both from an informal colonization in everyday life and from intentional design practices” (Abásolo & Samson, 2013, p. 82).

Utilizing fragments of material culture, and consumer culture in particular, SUPERFLEX animated the memories of the community members, making private stories public. The objects at *Superkilen* have meaning and significance for the individuals who chose them, and, now, these objects have new significance for the everyday users of the site in Nørrebro. In this regard, the objects are not purely aesthetic—there are stories associated with each one—and each object at *Superkilen* sends a message, transmitting meaning in shorthand. The artifacts also represent more than fifty nationalities and, by extension, signify the identities of diverse community members. Through this deliberate design practice, SUPERFLEX and BIG communicated the value of these diverse groups to Danish culture and clearly established that Copenhagen is no longer a homogeneous city.

In addition to renegotiating the meaning of space in Nørrebro, the site has taken on a life of its own in the cultural discourse and, more conspicuously, consumer culture. Highly photogenic, *Superkilen* has become an international superstar. In a fascinating

display of Baudrillard's (1994) concept of the simulacrum, images of the space at *Superkilen* have popped up in various forms of material culture—going so far as to become an object of consumption, or to become hyperreal, as Baudrillard would say.



Figure 18: The front and back covers of the May 25, 2015 print edition of *The New Yorker* featuring Brandon Ó Sé's photograph of *Superkilen* in an advertisement for Apple's iPhone 6.

In a major advertising campaign in 2015, the computer manufacturing giant Apple Computer featured a photograph of *Superkilen* taken with the Apple iPhone 6 camera by a regular user, Brandon Ó Sé. The striking image of *Superkilen*'s undulating hill of asphalt and white stripes—now the iconic representation of the site—appeared on billboards across

the world in mega metropolises, including Berlin, Hollywood, and Tokyo, as well as in print advertising, including the back cover of the May 25, 2015 edition of *The New Yorker*. During my tour of BIG's studio in 2016, Bjarke Ingles joked the Apple advertisement "was like a SUPERFLEX project" (personal communication, June 2016). And, indeed, the advertisement echoes the SUPERFLEX project *Copyshop*, and two of their related projects, *I copy, therefore I am* and *If value then copy*. In these works, SUPERFLEX directly confronts the dealing and collecting of objects in the art world and the accompanying economic forces at play in the art market.



Figure 19: Installation view of SUPERFLEX's *If value then copy* (2017). Image courtesy Conradin Frei/von Barth.

Passing through the Copenhagen airport, I caught a glimpse firsthand of this commodification of the site. In an advertisement for tourism in Copenhagen, the same portion of the space—the giant asphalt hill—was being promoted as a part of the city to be consumed by tourists.

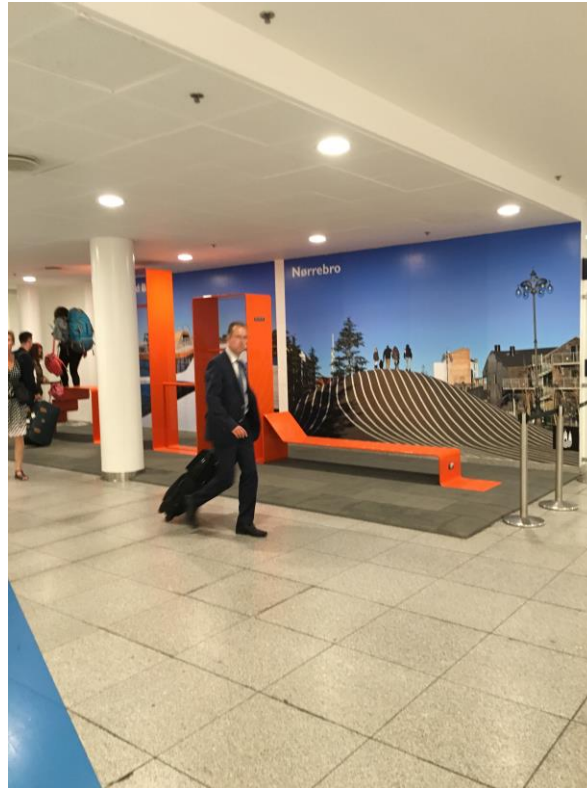


Figure 20: An image of *Superkilen* in an advertisement promoting tourism in Copenhagen at the Copenhagen airport. Photograph by Michelle Voss.

At *Superkilen*, the collection of objects belong to the public—not to collectors or institutions. Part municipal project, part artistic experiment, *Superkilen* is a hybrid form: public art meets public park. Blurring the boundaries between the art world and the public

remains a specialty of SUPERFLEX. On the occasion of their 2018 exhibition *One Two Three Swing!* at the Tate Modern in London, SUPERFLEX commented that “negotiating boundaries between the gallery and the public has been the core of what we do since the beginning” (Hyslop, 2018, p. 67). Through their projects, which they refer to as “tools,” SUPERFLEX promotes egalitarian access to art and the artistic process—often with the intention of giving communities “tools” for self-actualization.

For art education, introducing critical spatial practice into the field’s pool of knowledge can broaden the lexicon for artmaking and arts-based instruction, contributing to this spirit of egalitarian access to art. Fundamentally, SUPERFLEX’s *participation extreme* experiment for user participation at *Superkilen* represents a new approach to creating public art. By mobilizing underrepresented groups to actualize the vision for *Superkilen*, the site serves as both a critique of power and a collaborative work of art. Educators can encourage students to view public spaces outside of traditional galleries as sites for the co-creation of art, expanding this emerging dialogue on critical spatial practice and engaging new audiences in the production of culture in urban spaces.

THE ACTIVATION OF THE SOCIAL IS THE ART

The title of this study, *The Activation of the Social is the Art*, is a phrase borrowed from the writings of Nato Thompson, the former Artistic Director of Creative Time in New York City who is now leading the Philadelphia Contemporary. Thompson is a fierce advocate for socially engaged art, both as a curator and a critic, for many of the aforementioned reasons in this chapter. Thompson also places heavy emphasis on radical user involvement in the creation and siting of cultural projects—what SUPERFLEX terms *participation extreme*. This activation of the social dimension is the hallmark of socially

engaged art. While many socially engaged projects are conceptual works of art, they are anchored in concrete actions, such as the formation of relationships with project participants, the selection of specific forms to express meaning for community members, or the contribution to critical dialogues about culture and power.

For art education, further investigation into the realm of socially engaged art offers avenues for exploring how art can have practical implications in society. Most critically, art educators can demonstrate how creative exchange can be a pathway for underserved groups and invisible communities to participate in the public sphere. Herein lies the simple but critical distinction that makes socially engaged art projects unique: the intended audiences are not just passive observers, they are active collaborators in the co-creation of public art. Ultimately, socially engaged art projects have the potential to build cultural equity through arts-based civic engagement. Namely, socially engaged art projects can increase the diversity of citizens participating in the design of a civic project, incorporate the artistic process into city planning to address social issues, and empower citizens to share their distinct histories, identities, and spaces. Altogether, this is the activation of the social dimension in the co-creation of art.

FUTURE RESEARCH

For the field of art education, there remains significant gaps in research focusing on the co-creation of art in community settings. Most significantly, there are few opportunities for students to learn and practice socially engaged art in higher education. I hypothesize this is a result of the shortage of research in the field of art education related to socially engaged art. As a contemporary art form, social practice may require more time to mature—but, on the whole, art education tends to focus on the creation and exhibition

of tangible art forms by individual artists, such as ceramics, installations, paintings, photography, printmaking, and sculpture. While art educators have a formidable task in translating social practice to the classroom, the field has expansive possibilities for educators and students alike.

Additionally, there is little research in art education exploring ways in which artists use material culture to create socially engaged works of art. While Blandy and Bolin (2012) have strongly advocated for investigating material culture in art education, there is room for exploring how artists incorporate material culture into social practice. At *Superkilen*, SUPERFLEX directly engaged the issue of immigration through material culture. In an interconnected, globalized world, perhaps one of the most defining features of the last century is immigration, and, more pointedly, the aftermath of military conflict and political unrest: refugees. In response to this escalating humanitarian crisis, a number of artists are focusing their work in this sphere. By way of example, artist Ai Weiwei's recent works have directly engaged the plight of refugees, including his 2017 film, *Human Flow*, and his 2018 installation, *Laundromat*, consisting of 2,046 items of clothing abandoned by refugees who were forcibly evacuated from Lesbos, a Greek island.

Both Ai Weiwei's and SUPERFLEX's recent work signals strong undercurrents in contemporary art surrounding material culture and the powerful symbolism of objects in our lives. As this study and this brief example illustrate, there is tremendous potential for exploring ways in which artists engage the public through material culture and the creation of collaborative works of art to address the most pressing social issues of our time.

CONCLUSION

The terrain of the urban landscape offers rich possibilities for the co-creation of art. To reclaim and activate public spaces, cities, communities, and artists can collaborate on projects that incorporate art into the built environment in playful, surprising, and extraordinary ways. At the same time, in densely populated urban cores around the globe, people are often divided along lines of race and class. The aim of this study was to demonstrate how socially engaged art can puncture these divisions and unlock the promise of cultural equity. *Superkilen* demonstrates a model for stitching together loose threads of a city's cultural fabric through an inclusive process for creating and siting public art. As art educators engage with increasingly diverse audiences and learners, skills associated with this type of collaborative artistic practice can promote acceptance and understanding of difference. Likewise, as an emerging field, socially engaged art offers an expansive territory for research and critical discourse within art education.

Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Letter



OFFICE OF RESEARCH SUPPORT

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

P.O. Box 7426, Austin, Texas 78713 · Mail Code A3200
(512) 471-8871 · FAX (512) 471-8873

FWA # 00002030

Date: 05/27/16

PI: Christopher O Adejumo

Dept: Art/Art History

Title: Artists, Public Spaces, and Extreme Community
Participation: Lessons from SUPERFLEX and the Development of
Superkilen

Re: IRB Exempt Determination for Protocol Number 2016-05-0058

Dear Christopher O Adejumo:

Recognition of Exempt status based on 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

Qualifying Period: 05/27/2016 to 05/26/2019 . Expires 12 a.m. [midnight] of this date.
A continuing review report must be submitted in three years if the research is ongoing.

Responsibilities of the Principal Investigator:

Research that is determined to be Exempt from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review is not exempt from ensuring protection of human subjects. The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for the following throughout the conduct of the research study:

1. Assuring that all investigators and co-principal investigators are trained in the ethical principles, relevant federal regulations, and institutional policies governing human subject research.
2. Disclosing to the subjects that the activities involve research and that participation is voluntary during the informed consent process.
3. Providing subjects with pertinent information (e.g., risks and benefits, contact information for investigators and ORS) and ensuring that human subjects will voluntarily consent to participate in the research when appropriate (e.g., surveys, interviews).
4. Assuring the subjects will be selected equitably, so that the risks and benefits of the research are justly distributed.
5. Assuring that the IRB will be immediately informed of any information or unanticipated problems that may increase the risk to the subjects and cause the category of review to be reclassified to expedited or full board review.

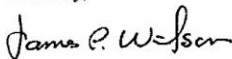
6. Assuring that the IRB will be immediately informed of any complaints from subjects regarding their risks and benefits.
7. Assuring that the privacy of the subjects and the confidentiality of the research data will be maintained appropriately to ensure minimal risks to subjects.
8. Reporting, by submission of an amendment request, any changes in the research study that alter the level of risk to subjects.

These criteria are specified in the PI Assurance Statement that was signed before determination of exempt status was granted. The PI's signature acknowledges that they understand and accept these conditions. Refer to the Office of Research Support (ORS) website www.utexas.edu/irb for specific information on training, voluntary informed consent, privacy, and how to notify the IRB of unanticipated problems.

1. Closure: Upon completion of the research study, a Closure Report must be submitted to the ORS.
2. Unanticipated Problems: Any unanticipated problems or complaints must be reported to the IRB/ORS immediately. Further information concerning unanticipated problems can be found in the IRB Policies and Procedure Manual.
3. Continuing Review: A Continuing Review Report must be submitted if the study will continue beyond the three year qualifying period.
4. Amendments: Modifications that affect the exempt category or the criteria for exempt determination must be submitted as an amendment. Investigators are strongly encouraged to contact the IRB Program Coordinator(s) to describe any changes prior to submitting an amendment. The IRB Program Coordinator(s) can help investigators determine if a formal amendment is necessary or if the modification does not require a formal amendment process.

If you have any questions contact the ORS by phone at (512) 471-8871 or via e-mail at orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

Sincerely,



James Wilson, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair

Appendix B: Interview Transcripts

BESAR RAKIPI, MANAGER, NØRREBROHALLEN – JUNE 25, 2016

- Besar: If I have to think of a specific word, it may be a problem.
- Michelle: Well, I don't speak any Danish. Except for ... Let's see if I can say it right? Tak.
- Besar: Tak—uh-hu.
- Michelle: And then, favil. Did I say it wrong?
- Besar: Farvel?
- Michelle: Favel? Faveel?
- Besar: Farvel!
- Michelle: Yes—farvel. Like goodbye.
- Besar: Farvel.
- Michelle: Yeah, that's it. Tak and farvel! Thank you and goodbye.
- Michelle: You were saying your brother went back to Macedonia, 'cause he didn't feel at home six years ago.
- Besar: It's more. 10 years ago, actually. Just fly by.
- Michelle: I was saying, do you feel at home here?
- Besar: I used to, but not so much, the last two, three years.
- Michelle: Why is that?
- Besar: My wife is from Macedonia, so she is only going to be living in Denmark for five, six years. She doesn't feel at home. She misses her family a lot. That becomes also part of my problem. She's not happy, so because she doesn't feel at home here, she feels different, and the other part is because of the Danish National Party, the right one, was just getting more and more votes, and is getting more and more powerful,

and I'm tired of hearing the immigration debate. The foreigners. Every time you're watching the news, there's always something about ... People see you more and more ... They don't see you as a Dane, even though I've been living here for 30 years. I share the Danish values with them, but I'm still not a Dane. Even though when I go see the Danish soccer team, I get goosebumps when we sing the national anthem, but it's still not enough. Sometimes, I feel like maybe I should be in Macedonia.

Michelle: Do you have children?

Besar: Two.

Michelle: And they go to school ...

Besar: Kindergarten. I have a son, five, and a girl who's three.

Michelle: Do you think that ... Do they speak Danish? Do y'all speak Danish only to them?

Besar: No, at home, we speak Albanian.

Michelle: You do?

Besar: Yeah. They speak Danish at kindergarten, and when we go out, we also speak Danish. The private home, it's something. That's because we also want them to know their roots, and they have to know to speak Albanian, because they also come down there every summer. They're actually down there now. They left last Sunday. It's easier for them if they can speak Albanian, also with their grandparents and so on.

Michelle: Do you speak Albanian in public?

Besar: Sometimes with my grandpa. I usually try to speak Danish when I'm in public.

Michelle: Why do you think that is?

Besar: Just to be polite, I think. So, people don't look at me, what are they doing? But sometimes, it's okay to speak a foreign language, but if you reverse to Danish and back to Albanian, then people know that you're not a tourist, then look at you, why don't like you speak like, can't you

speak Danish? Unless I work here, because the other guy that works here, he's also Albanian. He tries to speak Albanian to me sometimes, and just uh-uh (negative) not at work. We speak Danish. It's not polite, because people don't know what we're talking about. They'll perhaps think we're talking about the other guy in the office.

Michelle: How long have you worked here?

Besar: I've been here since ... Oh, that's a long time. 1998 to almost ... 18 years. I started as a student job while I was 18. In the coffee shop, over here, where the information desk is now. It's a fab place. But a lot of people also came then. I finished school, then I took a year off school, and started to work 37 hours a week, and I wasn't challenged. Then I asked my boss. I wanted to be challenged. I wanted to do something else. Then, it became an offer to become—I hate the word—junior manager. It's like it goes two years education while I was working here, and then, in 2006, I became manager of the place.

Michelle: You've seen the neighborhood change a lot probably. How has it changed?

Besar: First of all, a lot of buildings, areas. There's been a huge investment, just to take this, this 200 thousand square meters, even though it doesn't seem so big.

Michelle: From the outside, it looks huge.

Besar: Some people, when they come here, is this really big? I didn't think so, because we also have the department, so a lot of people also come for the job interview, and get surprised. Oh, this is me. But one of those services, but when my brother's wife, she came to Denmark for her first time, I think it was six years ago, seven years ago, and we came, because she wanted to see where I was working, and we came down, and we turned at the corner over there, and this is where it starts, the place that I'm working, and she looked at it, and there was graffiti everywhere, and the windows, they were, what do you call it, you can see the windows, because there was ...

Michelle: Bars.

Besar: No, not bars. There were ...

Michelle: I know what you're talking about. They cover windows.

Besar: They were covered, because in 1972, when it was built, of course, you couldn't do sports, if you got the sun in your eyes, so that was the way to do it, to cover the windows. And we turned around the corner, and she smiled at me, and she said, "I didn't know that you were a jail inspector," because it was a prison. I said, "No, you have to get inside, first," so that was one of the things I thought, all right, we have to do something about this, especially about the windows to open up, because it has two effects. One is that, of course, people can see what is happening inside, but this is, when you open up. Another thing is that you get light outside, so it becomes a little bit more secure for people, because this is Nørrebro and it has its reputation. I don't think that it's so bad, but that's because I'm living here, but it has its reputation, for good and bad.

Michelle: What would you say the reputation is in Nørrebro ?

Besar: A lot of foreigners, big changes of getting marked by someone. A lot of people smoking pot. A place where there's many students, and a place where there are a lot of people in very few square meters, compared to the rest of the city. You don't have so many green areas as you would have in Vesterbro or the city, in Amager so those are quick, yeah.

Michelle: But you've said there's been a lot of investment.

Besar: Yeah.

Michelle: Starting around when? When do you think that started?

Besar: First time, it was in '98, I think. The first one, where we have the coffee shop we have to open. That lasted 10 years. Then, there came a new project, where we had to open even more up with the windows open up, that was covered, the area outside, and Mjølnerparken, and down there, so you know Mjølnerparken?

Michelle: No.

Besar: It's three, 400 meters from here. It's a big ghetto area, where there live a lot of ... So every time there's something ... Everyone in Denmark, even Jutland knows what Mjølnerparken is, because it is in the news often. I kind of compare it like seeing an area in New York, where the whole

state knows where it is if you mention Harlem, for example, or something. They go, "Ah, that's in New York. We know that." But they are wasting now 800 million in the next two years, in the Mjølnerparken.

Michelle: Why? For social housing, or for ...

Besar: No, because there are a lot of ... How do you call it? It's a ghetto, so they want to open up again, and get students in there, get Danes in there, so the main department is gonna be ripped down, and they're gonna make shops and markets and stuff like this, to open. Then they're gonna do something with the apartments so they attract more Danish families, so they have a mixture of people in Mjølnerparken, so it's not just mostly Arabians, but also, Turks, Pakistanis, and stuff.

Michelle: Were you involved at all in the development of *Superkilen*? Did they ...

Besar: The process was like ... It was ... How do you call it? When companies have to give an offer how much they come across, whether they make a project, you have to choose ...

Michelle: A competition? A competition.

Besar: Yeah, so there were three or four good projects, but the people in Nørrebro didn't want *Superkilen*. They wanted another project, but the municipality, I don't know why. They went and chose BIG's project, which is *Superkilen*.

Michelle: So, people in Nørrebro didn't want *Superkilen*?

Besar: The people who was involved in the process, they actually chose another project that they thought was better than this.

Michelle: You mean like the city council? Do you mean ... The neighbors didn't want ...

Besar: Yes, they didn't think it was bad, but there was another project that was better.

Michelle: Do you know what it was?

Besar: It was more three . . . many more . . . There was water elements about it, and there was green areas, something like that, as I can remember, so when I saw the picture, I also thought that was much better than this red asphalt. But the municipality, the city council went on to choose this project, so from the start, there was a lot of opponents against it, but it went through. I was a part of the *Superkilen* board.

Michelle: You were?

Besar: The board was representative of their area, so they could be us, 'cause we were neighbors. We could be the building the other side, because just ordinary people. Not a cultural stance or something. Just ordinary ... Lots of parks. A lot of interest in the area, that had a vote, and the *Superkilen* vote. We didn't have any power in that way, but it was a way to give our opinion.

Michelle: What does the word "*Superkilen*" mean? Does it have a meaning?

Besar: "Kile" is like the triangle thing so the door stays open. Do you know those?

Michelle: Oh, a door stop.

Besar: One what you put it.

Michelle: It wedges.

Besar: Yeah. I can find one.

Michelle: Yes, we have them.

Besar: Yeah, they're plastics, usually.

Michelle: They're shaped like that. (*Michelle draws a triangular wedge.*)

Besar: Yeah, that's right. "Super" means "super."

Michelle: This means this. Super wedge. Super. So, the name came from BIG, or from the city?

Besar: I think it was from BIG. I think it was. That was their name. The city council, liked the project, because of the concept about the 53

nationalities living in Nørrebro but they thought, must be, because it had an history about the project. It has a storytelling, while the other was maybe a lot of green, and it was nice area, with green trees, and water elements for the children, but it didn't have that storytelling about the project. I think that's why the city council chose *Superkilen*, and I also think it's a good story to take 53 objects at *Superkilen*, which comes for each nationality that lives in Nørrebro .

Michelle: Did you know ... Everybody knew from the start that they were gonna be traveling to select objects, and there was gonna be stories behind it. That was part of the plan. When I first asked you about the project, you said, "I love it and I hate it." Why do you love it, and why do you hate it? What's the tension there?

Besar: I hate it because if you go outside now, it's only three years old, and it looks like it has its status for 50 years. It looks tramped and trashed, and that's why I hate it. And I hate it because I still miss a green area. It's a large ramp. It's asphalt that would hold everything. That's why, and I love it because people just love it.

Michelle: They love what?

Besar: The people just loving it.

Michelle: Oh, the people love it.

Besar: Yeah, loving it. I don't know how many organizations that has been here to get a tour of the *Superkilen*, and sometimes, I think, come on, this isn't the pyramids. Why is somebody coming to see it? And it's good because the whole *Superkilen*, you get so many different people to use it, it's all from the skaters, to the families with children, foreigners, the pasteling people, so you get a lot of groups. That's fascinating to see how many groups there can be out there at the *Superkilen* without any conflicts, and so on. Of course, there are ordinary conflicts. That's why it's really Nørrebro . It really says what Nørrebro is about.

Michelle: Do you think that there ... You mentioned what you hate about it, so do you think there are specific failures of the project?

Besar: I always said, because people think, oh, it's fantastic. Look how many people is coming out there. But I was just obsessed with that coming, because it's *Superkilen*. I think whatever has been out there, just if you

open up the area, there would still be a lot of people out there. If project number two had won, I still think there would be so many people. If project number three had won, I still think that would read so many people. I don't know, but for me, it doesn't seem that is the project that the term staff, I think, just because you get a big area where people can meet, but think that's the part of why it's so successful. So, that's what I'm ... I don't know. That's what I just think. Maybe people wouldn't come. It would have been a lot of threes, and whatever. We will say, "Ooo, water over here." I don't think so, but what else.

But the main thing, if you go outside, you can see how cramped ... Now fifth year, because now, the surface, there's a big problem with the surface. That's why it isn't finished yet. Five years now. You think, come on, five years. Please finish it.

Michelle: How long has construction ... When did it start?

Besar: I think a year, then it was finished. It didn't take very ... But because they had problems with the surface, then they had to find a new way, but they wanted the colors before red colors. But it was ... And it still is difficult. That's why they're trying with the carpets to see how does that work, try with another, how does that work, and I just wrote last year, that because there's a sign in summer 2015, we're gonna renew this. We're having these three areas, because we want to decide, it was some information for the public, but in summer 2015, we will decide. Now we're in 2016, and I called the lady and said you have to remove it. People are still, they're reading and laughing, 2015, we are in '16 now. What are they doing? Remove that sign.

But now, it's '17, I got the information two days ago. They're gonna do it another way, because they found another place in Denmark where they have those kind of colors, where you don't have to renew it everywhere. It took a year pr two, because of the sun, then you can see the colors. If you go on the Internet, and you look *Superkilen*, then you can see the difference about how it looked in the start, and the colors now, because of the sun, because they are fading.

Michelle: If you could change anything, like if you had a say, what would you change?

Besar: I think what I would have changed ... It's not because it's us, but we should have been more involved, because we are spoiled in the cultural

sense that we have ... Our idea is to make, our first of all, the citizens of Copenhagen, and we should have been involved much more, because we are huge neighbor to the area, so they shouldn't have done it, because now that I think, we have the boxing ring, and I think, it's idiotic, not to have thought us in the boxing ring, because one year—where can we install this? I don't know where we can install it. I have my own problems. Look around. Look at the corner. It's not because I want to see a letter over there, but I don't know what to do with it, so you may find ... And around the garbage cans, the big ones, at the time, I thought, can you do something about, because they are not beautiful to shape kind of box, so people don't see the garbage boxes. The big boxes, not the small ones, and they didn't.

Now they're saying, "Can you remove them?" No, we can't remove them. We have to throw the garbage someplace. Now, they're trying, and all of a sudden, they go back five years, and you can see, how do you call it when you type of a meeting, how do you call it when you are meeting somebody so an exam it is being set or something.

Michelle: It's notes.

Besar: You go back five years, and you can see in the notes, it's basically saying it's a good idea to do something about the big garbage can. They're not beautiful, and you can do ... Because that was the idea of a big ... That's why I was frustrated. It was to make things where you can use the city as it is, stairs to make it like a piano, so people think it's funny to step up. When you go down to have a mirror where you get big, look small. He wants to make the city fun as it is, so you could have made something, a little mount or something with the skaters, could use it, but underneath the mountain, there is the big garbage.

Michelle: So, you're saying, there's some practical considerations that they just forgot, ignored.

Besar: It's like architects. I feel like also in here sometimes, they will really want to make it fascinating, but they also have to remember that the normal day has to be flexible for the people who are using it. I've heard from other architects. I don't know, but I've heard about BIG. He makes a lot of ... I don't know if they're envy. Sometime, I can imagine that, but they're saying that when BIG is making something, it only lasts three or four years. Then, you have to use so much money to keep it

going. I don't know exactly, as I told you, but in this case, yeah, that's right. It lasted two or three years now, it looks like. I don't know.

Michelle: Is there anything ... Do you know a lot about the art ... The objects? Is that something that you're familiar with, or do you know anybody who was part of selecting the objects?

Besar: See over here, the Thai boxing club?

Michelle: Yeah.

Besar: There were two or three people traveling down to Thailand to find a boxing ring, so one of ... I don't know. But do you need that kind of information?

Michelle: It'd be interesting to talk to them.

Besar: To find somebody. That's why I'm asking. Find somebody from BIG to talk it, perhaps.

Michelle: I have a contact at BIG.

Besar: Nana?

Michelle: Nana, yes, and I was at their office yesterday, on Friday, and met with Bjarke, but I'm interested in people who live here, like you, or who work nearby, and their experience of it, because I think that's where you find out, like what you're saying, what the real life use of the site is like, and what could be done differently, but I'm also interested in the stories of the people who collected the art.

Besar: That product, I can't say much. I only know that see 'em, because we have a television with them. They were a part of choosing three of ... four guys were going to Thailand with some of Bjarke's people to choose.

Michelle: Do you know anybody that hasn't lived here very long, or that comes here a lot to *Superkilen*, or has lived right here, around *Superkilen* for a short amount of time, so not as long as you?

Besar: I have a worker from the library, who lives just above ... But I don't know if we can get in touch with him today. I think that would be

difficult. I just know that a lot are frustrated about the skaters out there. They hate a lot of neighbors.

Michelle: Really? That's interesting.

Besar: They make so much noise, that's why. I don't know. Have you noticed how many skaters there are out there? It's fair enough, because they're always doing that sound with the skateboard, and you have small children who has to go to bed at seven, because they have to go to school the next day. That's frustrating. Another thing, is a lot of the neighbors, it's a huge activity room now, so it's very popular, so every time there is a demonstration, a festival, it always go class, this getting use, so people think it's fair enough if you ... Because when we talk to them, they always say, "It's fair enough that once second week, three times a month, that there's something out there," but every weekend, every Saturday, Sunday, we're thinking about moving away from here, because there's too much noise. The comment is normally from the city council. Yeah, we are here, but this is the city. The city is living. The people, if you want to come, then it's up to the countries.

Michelle: That would be great. It would be great to be able to talk to somebody like that. I'm leaving on Monday, really early.

Besar: 'Cause I think it's his weekend off, but I don't know if he's ...

Michelle: Around.

Besar: But have you tried to get in contact with people sitting out there, just to talk.

Michelle: Yeah, I know. I need to do that as well. Something I'm curious about is if a lot of people that ... Like, yesterday, I was talking to some different girls. There was some groups of girls around this space, and none of them lived nearby, and they didn't come often, so that's what I'm kind of curious about is that most people that use the park are not from the neighborhood. I don't know, or if they come from ...

Besar: I'm most sure, that most of the people are people the neighborhood, not just right here, but 300 meters, 400 meters, 500 meters. Of course, there are common people from other parts of Copenhagen, but I think the main are people around from the neighborhood. When I come here with my children, it's by us because I live nearby. I wouldn't have come if I

lived on the other side of Copenhagen, I don't think I would have come here. That's not as practical for me, 'cause it's nearby, and I can sit and have a cup of coffee while the children are playing on the playground, so I think it's more the neighborhood people around here.

Michelle: Okay, 'cause I see a lot of Muslim women, women in hijabs, and burkas. Not the full burka, but is it ... The burka covers the face, right?

Besar: No, we just can see the eyes. It doesn't cover the whole face, but that's what we call the burka. And hijab is what we just, we see the whole face.

Michelle: In Texas, where I come from, you almost never see that, so it's very different to come here and see it everywhere. I mean, it seems like every other woman is in a hijab.

Besar: Because, they are mainly Arabians living in this area.

Michelle: Is that right?

Besar: Many. If you go down to Norrbrogade the main street of Nørrebro , you can see that every ... About every second, every smaller store is Arabian, but the store is a shawarma house, it's jewelry ... The butcher is from Arabia, the telephone shops are Arabian, so I think it's 80% or more that are Arabians, on Norrbrogade, so it's kind of like I haven't been there, but like Chinatown, and like-

Michelle: Little Italy.

Besar: I think it's like that, even though I haven't been there, but you can almost say that if you're going to Norrbrogade. There really a lot of Arabians in this neighborhood.

Michelle: Do you think that ... Again, I see a lot of them outside, and playing, and their children playing. Do you think that whatever would have been here, they would have used it. Doesn't really matter, or do you think that some things about the park make them feel more welcome?

Besar: I think to feel a little bit more welcome, because we'll see the sitting bench was something is written in Arabian, behind the field perhaps is part of me, they have done this for me, where they see a dentist from

Pakistan, the moon, they think, ah, this is my neighborhood. This is good.

Michelle: Is that a common sign, the Pakistan, the dentist sign, is that something you would see in ...

Besar: No, I see it because the Pakistani flag is like the moon, and it's green. I don't think it's Pakistani, but for me, it is. I also thought the star was Chinese and stuff. It's American. I didn't know that. When people see it, because the red spot, communism, and they think, Ahh, the Chinese star. That's not the Chinese ... It's an American star. Oh, okay. The bull ... I don't know why all this. When I see the bull for Vienna, I would think, that's Spanish. I don't know if it's Spanish.

Michelle: It is.

Besar: It is Spanish.

Michelle: It is, yes.

Besar: 'Cause you know the bullfighters, so I always thought it has to be Spanish.

Michelle: Do you think most people know the stories behind these objects?

Besar: No, what they're trying to do is with the small place, they have the status, so people can know ... I don't know. I don't think that they know.

Michelle: So you think they just interpret it however they see it?

Besar: I know it now, but when I see a sign, I always try to, where could this be from? Who knows. Actually, it's Japanese. Nobody knows that. I don't think that. But, of course, when you see the sprinkling, how do you call it?

Michelle: The fountain.

Besar: Yeah, that's Moroccan. I think, okay, it seems, because the . . . how do you call? Those in the bathrooms. How do you call those things that you put on walls in the bathrooms?

Michelle: The faucets.

Besar: I think, yeah, okay, I can see that. It looked like Northern African thing, but that's also fun. We had one who came in, "Why is that donuts store?" I said, "What?"

"The donut store."

"Why do you think there's a donut store here?"

"But I saw a sign at *Superkilen*, Vienna, I'm going and going. I can't see the donut store."

No, there isn't any donut store here, because you see the sign. They've been walking, they always come all the way down here. It has to be in here now. Why do you think there's a donut store in here? So, that's funny.

Michelle: That's great. Oh, I love that. Do people ever come in and ask you questions about the site?

Besar: Yeah. I don't know. I don't sit there, the information desk. Sometimes, I sit behind, and I hear people. A lot of people are curious about the area, because I've heard sometimes, the weekends when I'm here, especially on the holidays, Christmas, people have three, four days off. I've seen a lot of people looking around, and it looked like Danish tourists that comes from another part of Denmark who are here, trying to see what is this about. That's why some of my admiration about Bjarke Ingles is because it is working. People are coming all around the world, to see *Superkilen*, to hear about it, and sometimes, I think, come on. I don't think that's it. So interesting, but okay, that's just me.

Michelle: Well, so, for you, do you see it as just, oh, it's normal, or do you think there's anything about it that you're like, okay, that's different and unique? I haven't seen anything like that before?

Besar: No, for me, what's unique is that it's red, everything is red out there. That's unique for me. And other things are unique, because I know the story about it. I'm fascinated. I think it's a good story about 53 nationalities, even though the Albanian nationality is not there. Where's my object? You are not there! They said that's right, because they are partially right, because I'm a Macedonian citizen. Even though I'm Albanian, that's why you can't see any of the Albanian-

Michelle: Is there anything from Macedonia?

Besar: I haven't seen it yet.

Michelle: Okay.

Besar: So, that could be a little, because when you say 53, you have to show 53 objects. I don't know, because it's funny. I haven't seen anything from Macedonia.

Michelle: Do you know about how many people live around here and in this neighborhood, if you had to guess?

Besar: I think it's 80 thousand in Nørrebro .

Michelle: 80 thousand. And you think that most of them are Arabian.

Besar: Not most. Maybe 50%. But, of course, because of you're sitting , and the way that people look at dressing, then it looks like they are, because I see them much more than you see a Dane, you will notice me, so that's why sometimes, you think, oh, this is 90% of Arabians, but it isn't, so obviously, see a multiplication time July. A lot of people, because many of them to go back to their vacation to visit family, and then, you can see a lot of ... Okay. You can see that this isn't just Arabians. There are also a lot of other kind of people, and when I say "Arabians," I say, Moroccan, Palestines, Syrians. It's the whole wave. It's not just one people. It's like, you know what I mean?

It's not just I work Syrians or something. When I say Arabians, it's the whole, like it could be 10 nationalities.

Michelle: What was Nørrebro like when you moved here? Or when you started working here in 1998? What was the neighborhood like?

Besar: I can't remember. It wasn't a secure neighborhood. That's not way I can remember. I remember it as old, and needed a lift, so that's how I remember it.

Michelle: What was it, the *Superkilen* site, what was there before, before they changed it?

Besar: Maybe I can show you some pictures, if you can find them, but if you go way, way back, maybe it's better when I show you, and I can find some pictures, I think, but maybe I can find, but way, way back, when I started in '98 going over there, there was a car shop, and I was a flower lady, selling flowers, just the opposite side, it was on the pool, and then, we have something green, as I remember, but it was like alcoholic people were sitting there and just drinking, and then, nobody was using it. And there was also a part of Nørrebro where there was also small storage rooms. There was ... Everything was closed. You know, we had those, what do you call it? You know, when you go to war, you know those?

Where you see the wall. I have to take my ...

Michelle: Tanks?

Besar: Not tanks. How do you call it? You know, the thing you're putting so people don't climb, but what's it?

Michelle: Oh, barbed wire.

Besar: Barb wire. Yeah, barb wire, so many pictures of barb wire, so there was a lot of old storage rooms, so it looked much, much smaller area, because there were ... Four years ago, we didn't have the thing over here. We had things over here, so there was also a part that was closed and so it's four years ago, when we opened up.

Michelle: I think I've got a lot of good stuff, but if there's anything else you want to tell me or show me, I would love to see it.

Besar: I think I have to smoke a cigarette, then I can show you while I smoke and something. Maybe I can find, if you have time, maybe I can find to see if I can find some pictures from the old times. Just, then you can visualize it as it was.

Michelle: Yeah, that would be great.

DALAL HACHACHE AND HITAF ABDULLATIF – JUNE 25, 2016

Michelle: How long have you lived five minutes from here? Like how many years, or . . .

Hitaf: How many years? About eight ...

Dalal: 15. Yeah, 15 years.

Hitaf: 15 to 18 years.

Michelle: 15 or 18 years you've lived here?

Hitaf: Yeah.

Michelle: Really?

Hitaf: In this area.

Michelle: Oh, okay. Do you have family that live here?

Hitaf: Yeah, of course.

Michelle: Or your family? And do you come to the park often?

Hitaf: Me, yes. But not her.

Dalal: Not me.

Hitaf: She has little kids.

Dalal: The granddaughter.

Hitaf: I don't have kids. Only when she was with me.

Michelle: Oh.

Hitaf: So she can join me.

Michelle: Oh, okay. Okay. So you've lived here since before the park was built?

Dalal's Daughter:
Dalal: Yeah.
I like this one.

Michelle: The octopus slide. Oh, everybody loves the octopus slide.

Dalal: Yeah.

Michelle: I like your water balloons, too. That looks like fun.

Dalal: *Speaking Arabic to her children*

Hitaf: They want to have the water balloon.

Michelle: Oh, yeah. That's great.

Hitaf: Yeah.

Michelle: Oh, thank you. I'll take it. Yeah. Where can I throw it? Do you just throw them on the ground? Is that what you do?

Hitaf: Yeah.

Michelle: Oh, it's nice and cold. It actually feels good.

Hitaf: I put it like this.

Michelle: Oh that's great. How many kids do you have?

Dalal: Three.

Michelle: You have three kids.

Dalal: Three girls.

Michelle: And do you work?

Dalal: Yes.

Michelle: What do you do?

Dalal: I'm a counter. I do some accounting.

Michelle: Accounting? Yeah.

Dalal: To many company in Denmark and London and Brazil.

Michelle: Wonderful. Oh, okay. And you're married?

Dalal: Yeah.

Michelle: And what does your husband do?

Dalal: He is a mechanic for big machine. I think it called Caterpillar.

Michelle: Oh, Caterpillar.

Dalal: Yeah.

Michelle: Yeah.

Dalal: So he work this from since he was a kid in our country. And when he came he work the same company.

Michelle: So where did you come from?

Dalal: Lebanon.

Michelle: Lebanon. Okay. And did you come with your husband?

Dalal: No, I come down when I was eight years old with my family.

Michelle: You were eight years old and you moved to Denmark? Oh, wow.

Dalal: But he came when he was . . .

Michelle: Much older?

Dalal: Yeah, much older.

Michelle: A man. Okay.

Dalal: Yeah, a man.

Michelle: And you met him here in Denmark and you got married here in Denmark?

Dalal: Yeah, we married in Lebanon because we have to marry in Lebanon, then we married in Denmark.

Michelle: Oh, okay. But you're only a five minute walk from the park?

Dalal: Yes.

Michelle: Do you own the home that you live in?

Dalal: No.

Hitaf: Beside . . . *Speaking Arabic to Dalal*

Dalal: Oh.

Hitaf: Islamic's house.

Dalal: Mosque.

Michelle: It's a mosque?

Dalal: Yeah?

Hitaf: No. It's beside.

Michelle: Oh, it's next to a mosque.

Dalal: Yeah.

Hitaf: Next to a mosque.

Michelle: Yeah. It's next to a mosque.

Dalal: But we don't own it because my husband is too slow to think to buy something. He is afraid to pay too much. He is very slow.

Michelle: Right. I understand. Yeah.

Dalal: We think to buy something, but a house, not an apartment.

Michelle: Oh, like further out? Out of the city.

Dalal: Yeah.

Michelle: Yes. Okay.

Dalal: And the kids don't want . . .

Michelle: The kids don't want to move away from the city?

Dalal: Maria, she is in the school since . . .

Michelle: What grade is she in?

Dalal: Five.

Michelle: Okay.

Dalal: So she don't want to change school.

Michelle: She's very tall.

Dalal: Yeah.

Hitaf: Yeah.

Dalal: She is from my ex-husband.

Michelle: Oh, okay.

Dalal: So she is like his father, her father. Her father's family.

Michelle: Okay, okay.

Dalal: Not like me.

Michelle: You bring the kids to the park. And you've been coming since it opened?

Dalal: Yeah. Maybe because the little one, she want to come here now. She ask me every day, "Mama, can we go to the park?"

Michelle: What do they call the park? Do they a name for it?

Dalal: They call it the black ... This one.

Michelle: They call it the octopus?

Dalal: Yeah. The black octopus.

Michelle: The black octopus. That's interesting. Okay. And how long do they usually come for most days? How long do you stay here?

Hitaf: One, two hours.

Dalal: Two hours, yeah.

Michelle: Really?

Hitaf: Because they come from school and they can buy some slush ice on the way or something. And they come and they eat the ice.

Hitaf: Because Eldie is very new to . . .

Michelle: Oh.

Hitaf: To the market.

Dalal: So you can . . .

Hitaf: For example, now she want to buy some ice cream.

Michelle: Yeah?

Hitaf: That's okay. Because it's not too long.

Michelle: Right. Right. So do you know anything about all the objects?

Hitaf: Just a little.

Michelle: Just a little? Which ones do you know a little bit about?

Hitaf: I know something of those is from every country.

Michelle: Uh-huh—right.

Hitaf: Maybe because they want to give something—that it's okay to have some international from many countries and we are not different of other. Something like this.

Michelle: So do you like the park now better than what it was?

Hitaf: I haven't been here before it was this park.

Michelle: Oh. Okay.

Hitaf: That's why I don't remember what it was before.

Michelle: Oh, so you're saying you didn't even come here.

Hitaf: Never interesting to come.

Michelle: It was never interesting.

Hitaf: No. The kids don't want to be here.

Dalal: Yeah, and it was no special with this place before.

Michelle: So do you have a favorite part of the park?

Dalal: A favor?

Michelle: A favorite. Best. What's your favorite?

Dalal: This one.

Michelle: The octopus slide.

Hitaf: For the kids. I stay here, and sometimes my mom come and we can sit like this and talk and the kids play.

Dalal: Sitting there and talk.

Hitaf: That's very good. And that why we are very happy for this. Something there is very special. People can make some barbecue

and something like this there, but I have not do it before. I am coming and sitting here, in the same place.

Michelle: Is there anything you would change? You would do different?

Hitaf: Yeah. I think ... I'm missing something ... Flowers and the rose here. I think it will be beautiful with more.

Michelle: So you said missing flowers and what was the other thing you said?

Hitaf: Rose.

Michelle: Roses. Roses, yes. Uh-huh.

Michelle: I'm also intrigued about the hijab and why some girls will wear them and some won't.

Is it just a personal choice?

Dalal: Many of Muslim they take it.

Michelle: Yeah.

Hitaf: It's very person. And it's a combination with you and God. If you want to take some hijabs off, that's okay. If you don't want to take that's also okay. We both are Muslim, and we face now Ramadan. I do and she do. But she has hijab and I don't have hijab. That's okay. Maybe it's not a good ... How to say it? How to say it? Good to see that ... Maybe you can see at her and she is Muslim, but you can't see at me and I am Muslim.

Michelle: That's right.

Hitaf: But we are Muslim and we do the same thing and we ...

Yeah. We do the same thing, we come every day.

No is different between us.

Michelle: Yeah. So do you feel welcome in here in this place, and in the neighborhood?

Hitaf: Yeah.

Michelle: What is it about the neighborhood that makes you feel that way?

Hitaf: I think here, especially here it's very much of Muslim live in here, so it's more open and we don't feel anything so where we are special. Or so we have a good relationship with all people. I think it's . . . Especially here people is very . . .

Dalal: Open mind.

Hitaf: . . . Open mind. All of that a little country . . . Without the city.

Dalal: And I think the same, because many . . . In my work. They ask me every day, "Why you don't eat meat?" I told them I'm Muslim and I can't eat the meat if it is not halal. They don't look at me, that's okay. See, she don't eat, don't eat no. They say to me, "No, don't eat of this because they are meat here. Don't eat this, eat this." Maybe because they know many Muslim and they know that it's okay. We are different, but we can work together, we can have friend together, we can be together. That's okay to be different, but it's not okay to disclaim because if you are Muslim.

Michelle: Right. So you feel respected.

Dalal: Yes. But I think because we are in the city.

Michelle: Oh.

Dalal: Maybe if you are out of the city, you will have another . . .

Hitaf: They are here and see the media, they have not so many Muslims in their parts. So it would be different.

Michelle: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Hitaf: They will believe that everything coming from media is true. It's not true. Because not all Muslim is terrorist, and not all Muslim is extremes. We can be everything, and we can work on everything. So maybe they should learn some Muslim and they change their mind.

Hitaf: It's not that the same picture some the media.

Michelle: That's right. Yeah. Yes. So you have all girls?

Dalal: Yeah. And I am one girl in my family. Five boy and one girl. So I got three.

Michelle: That's great. What do you think about Brexit, the British voting to leave the EU?

Dalal: Yeah, I think ...

Michelle: What do you think?

Dalal: I think it's not good because many of Danish people will be unemployed. They don't have work because . . . There is too many combination with England and Denmark. And many from Denmark work in England.

Michelle: Oh.

Dalal: Many export are from Denmark. It's going to change something.

Michelle: Can you write your name? Even just your first name here.

Michelle: And then ... I'm going to give you a new pencil. Is that pencil worn down? I've taken a lot of notes with it.

Dalal: It's okay.

Michelle: It's okay? That might be better.

Dalal: That's my name. Dalal, and my after name, Hachache.

Michelle: Okay. Thank you. And your name, too, if we can write your name.

Michelle: Great, thank you. I really appreciate your time. This is really wonderful.

JOHANNA HOOD – JUNE 25, 2016

Johanna: You know what's around here? Is this housing? Is this public housing, then because you said this originally was a sketchy part of the city.

Michelle: It still is considered pretty sketchy.

Johanna: This is considered sketchy?

Michelle: I know.

Johanna: This is not sketchy. This does not look sketchy at all.

Michelle: Right. I know.

Johanna: But is this public housing?

Michelle: No.

Johanna: Is that why it's considered sketchy?

Michelle: No. There is some. Some of it. A little bit. It's interesting just right back on this other side there's this place, I'm probably gonna say it wrong, it's called Mjølnerparken.

Michelle: So, you come from Vesterbro. I'm not saying it right.

Johanna: It doesn't matter.

Michelle: On bike, 15, 20 minutes.

Johanna: Yeah.

Michelle: Occasionally to come here?

Johanna: I would say we come here more in the summer than in the winter.

Michelle: Okay. But you've been coming since it's opened?

Johanna: We've only been living here two and a half, coming up on three years, and the reason we found this place is we were actually considering renting a place.

Michelle: Okay.

Johanna: We stumbled upon this.

Michelle: Okay.

Johanna: We thought it was really interesting because we also used to have . . . We rented a place when we couldn't find housing up over there. So we would transit by a lot.

Michelle: Right. So, now y'all kind of come back occasionally. Are you still interested in renting a place over here?

Johanna: We eventually found a place to buy.

Michelle: To buy?

Johanna: Yes

Michelle: And so you bought—

Johanna: It's a really long story, but we moved in a year like eight times because we couldn't find out where to live. Then found a place, but we had to buy it basically.

Michelle: And this is in Vesterbro, you had to buy it?

Johanna: Yeah.

Michelle: Is it like the co-op setup that I've been hearing about?

Johanna: Yes.

Michelle: It's very interesting. I've been fascinated by these courtyards that they have.

Johanna: They're amazing, especially some of the ones in Vesterbro.

Michelle: Really?

Johanna: If you look on Google Maps satellite view, you can see the ones that are really big.

Michelle: Wow.

Johanna: Some of them have an orchard inside.

Michelle: Oh, that's amazing.

Johanna: Hi, Sweetie. What's the matter Sweetheart? Hi. How are you? Did you want to say hi?

Michelle: Is this your little girl?

Johanna: Yeah.

Michelle: Aw.

Johanna: Beautiful. Hello.

Johanna's Daughter: Mama.

Johanna: Hi.

Michelle: So what is your favorite part of the park? You were telling your mom ... your mom was asking you what your favorite part of the park is here.

Johanna's Daughter: Yeah.

Michelle: What's your favorite part?

Johanna's Daughter: That's the giant hill.

Michelle: The giant hill? Is that what you call it? The giant hill.

Johanna's Daughter: The giant hill for sure.

Johanna: What is it in Danish? Is it called the giant hill in Danish?

Johanna's Daughter: It's not called anything in Danish. I would call it ... In Danish, the giant hill is [speaking Danish].

Johanna: What about the octopus? You like the octopus? That used to be you're favorite thing.

Johanna's Daughter: Mommy, do you remember where else I can try to skate?

Johanna: Honey, do you have to go to the bathroom?

Johanna's Daughter: No.

Johanna: Are you sure?

Johanna's Daughter: Yes. Mom, do you know somewhere where it's really steep and I can skate?

Johanna: You know what? This is the biggest hill that I know. I don't think we can find a steeper hill for you.

Michelle: So do y'all know anything about this site, like the objects and things like that? Have y'all ever looked into that?

Johanna: No, I haven't at all, actually. I just know that there's a rock climbing gym over there.

Michelle: Yes.

Johanna: And some funky white swings over there that you can swing on.

Michelle: Right.

Johanna: The octopus we know. I don't know if that's supposed to be an octopus.

Michelle: It is.

Johanna: It is. Okay. 'Cause that's how we talk about the park. It's the octopus park.

Michelle: The octopus park.

Johanna: Yeah.

Michelle: That's cute. Very cute.

Johanna: Then there's also an amazing park on the other side. Have you been down there?

Michelle: I saw—

Johanna: With the airplane.

Michelle: . . . the skateboarding park, but maybe I missed it.

Johanna: You need to go just a little bit further.

Michelle: Okay.

Johanna: I think it's half an airplane. It's not a real airplane, but it's a wooden ... It's a very different environment. It's much greener.

Michelle: Greener. Okay.

Johanna: Lots of green space, lots of trees, lots of mud. But I don't know much about the site.

Michelle: Okay.

Johanna: What inspires it?

Johanna's Daughter: Mom, can I skate on the slides?

Johanna: On the slides on your skate?

Johanna's Daughter: Yeah.

Johanna: No. On your scooter? No, I think we might get in trouble if you do that. I'd like to say yes, but I don't think it's a good idea.

Johanna's Daughter: Why?

Johanna: Tim, why do you think?

Johanna's Daughter: It's fun.

Johanna: I'm sure it might be fun, but do you think it's meant for scootering?

Johanna's Daughter: But.
Johanna: I'm sure it might be fun, but which is the better place for scootering?

Johanna's Daughter: Yeah. Fun.
Johanna: You will get in trouble if you do that.

Johanna's Daughter: Fun.
Johanna: Why don't you see if you can follow the lines around?

Johanna's Daughter: No.
Johanna: Well, go and entertain yourself.

Johanna's Daughter: I want to blast off and see where the lines will take me.
Johanna: Okay. You check it out.

Michelle: So the story is the artists—well, really the city wanted whoever was designing this space to represent the 60 different nationalities that live around the neighborhood, so the artist traveled with groups from the neighborhood to different countries to select objects to bring back, so—

Johanna: Is that why there are palm trees?

Michelle: That's why there's palm trees.

Johanna: I've always wondered.

Michelle: It was a German landscape architecture firm, TOPOTEK 1. They were involved in all the landscape design and that was, I think, one of their ideas was to integrate trees from all these different countries. So, that's that.

Johanna: So is that why there's the interesting looking blue house down there?

Michelle: The pavilion?

Johanna: Yeah.

Michelle: The pavilion . . . Oh wait, the blue house.

Johanna: Yeah.

Michelle: It's from Russia. It's a replica of . . . Everything here is either an object they actually took from the country or they created a replica of it. Yeah.

Johanna: Including the sign?

Michelle: Vintage sign from Qatar, yes. But yet with purpose and meaning.

NANNA GYLDHOLM MØLLER, SENIOR ARCHITECT, BIG – JUNE / JULY 2016

UTmail Mail - Superkilen Interview for The University of Texas



Michelle Leigh Voss <michellevoss@utexas.edu>

Superkilen Interview for The University of Texas

7 messages

Michelle Voss <michellevoss@utexas.edu>

Mon, Jun 6, 2016 at 3:42 PM

To: ng@big.dk

Hello Nanna,

I am researching Superkilen for The University of Texas, and I am traveling to Copenhagen to conduct interviews and visit the site from June 20--June 26. Would you be available for an interview during this time? I have already arranged to interview SUPERFLEX, and I am also very interested in your perspective on the project.

Alternatively, I could send you questions for you to answer via email, if that would be more convenient for you.

Please let me know if you have any questions for me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards,

Michelle

:: Michelle Voss
:: 512.589.8303
:: michellevoss@utexas.edu

Nanna Gyldholm Møller <ng@big.dk>
To: Michelle Voss <michellevoss@utexas.edu>

Fri, Jun 24, 2016 at 4:51 AM

Hi Michelle

Very nice to meet you today.

Feel free to send me your questions via email.

Enjoy your stay in Copenhagen and talk to you soon :)

Venligst / Best regards,

Nanna Gyldholm Møller

Senior Architect
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BIG CPH

Kløverbladsgade 56

2500 Valby, Copenhagen

Michelle Voss <michellevoss@utexas.edu>
To: Nanna Gylholm Møller <ng@big.dk>

Fri, Jun 24, 2016 at 6:38 AM

Wonderful to meet you today, Nanna. BIG's office is incredible. I am so glad I had the opportunity to visit, and I really appreciate you taking the time to answer my questions. It would be great to have your perspective on the following:

1. Can you tell me what your role was in the design of Superkilen and when you began working on it?
2. What were some of the most difficult challenges your team faced when designing the project?
3. What were the benefits of collaborating with SUPERFLEX? Were there any challenges during the collaboration?
4. In your opinion, what is the most successful aspect of the project? Similarly, do you think there are aspects of the project that failed?

I was the project leader on the competition and when it moved into the detailed phases I was design lead/ project leader. We began working on the competition in 2007.

2. What were some of the most difficult challenges your team faced when designing the project?

The main challenge were to navigate through the users wishes and to integrate them into the project in the best way. It was the first time for us to orchestrate such a big user participation, so we had to invent our own way of doing it. Also one of the biggest challenges were to convince the users that they did not need a big green lawn, but more paved multifunctional areas.

3. What were the benefits of collaborating with SUPERFLEX? Were there any challenges during the collaboration?

I think the collaboration with Superflex was like a very happy marriage. They have a very conceptual approach to what they do like we do. They helped keeping the entire teams focus on the main concept; the World exhibition.

4. In your opinion, what is the most successful aspect of the project? Similarly, do you think there are aspects of the project that failed?

For me the most successful aspect of the project is to experience how it's actually used on an everyday basis.

It's fantastic too see how people from with very different cultural and social background meet at Superkilen; around the fountain when their kids are playing at the octopus, on one of the many benches around the area or while training in the muscle beach or using the outdoor fitness area.

For me that was the main goal, to make people interact and meet and then of course the massive amount of people using it every day. Of the 3 areas, the Black Square is in my opinion the most successful.

It's almost as if this exhibition with all these different objects spread around in the park, makes people feel less alien, it's becomes easier to blend in being surrounded by all these diverse objects.

I would say that aesthetically the Red Square failed – the colors has lost their intensity and the square has not been fixed after repairing it. It will get a new paving next year, I look very much forward to that.

Have a fantastic summer :)

Venligst / Best regards,

Nanna Gylholm Møller

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Michelle Voss <michellevoss@utexas.edu>
To: Nanna Gylholm Møller <ng@big.dk>

Thu, Jul 7, 2016 at 9:56 AM

Thank you so much for your wonderful answers, Nanna! A couple of questions did pop to mind as I was reading your replies:

1. You mentioned that Superkilen was the first time you orchestrated such big user participation. Can you describe the process of orchestrating the user participation? How did you and your team decide which users were the most important?

2. You also noted that one of the biggest challenges was to convince users they did not need a "big green lawn." Why do you think they wanted a "big green lawn"?

3. Knowing what you know now, is there anything you would have done differently at Superkilen?

Many, many thanks!

My Best,

Michelle

:: Michelle Voss
:: 512.589.8303
:: michellevoss@utexas.edu

Nanna Gylholm Møller <ng@big.dk>
To: Michelle Voss <michellevoss@utexas.edu>
Cc: Daria Pahota <dp@big.dk>

Fri, Jul 8, 2016 at 4:42 AM

Hi Michelle

Please find my answers below in red.

:)

Venligst / Best regards,

Nanna Gylholm Møller

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From: Michelle Voss [mailto:michellevoss@utexas.edu]
Sent: 7. juli 2016 16:57
To: Nanna Gylholm Møller <ng@big.dk>
Subject: Re: Superkilen Interview for The University of Texas

Thank you so much for your wonderful answers, Nanna! A couple of questions did pop to mind as I was reading your replies:

1. You mentioned that Superkilen was the first time you orchestrated such big user participation. Can you describe the process of orchestrating the user participation? How did you and your team decide which users were the most important?

All users and ideas were welcome. We made a physical mailbox where people could post ideas, we made a webpage where you could read about the project and email ideas to, we had ads in the local newspaper and we invited to meeting in the neighborhood.

Not all segments attended though, so Superflex reached out to these groups afterwards.

2. You also noted that one of the biggest challenges was to convince users they did not need a "big green lawn." Why do you think they wanted a "big green lawn"?

Would also love to have more green lawns around in the city – it's very nice in the (very few) weeks of actual summer here in Denmark ;) but there is a very hard use of the urban spaces in this area the rest and all the remaining weeks during the year, the green lawn would have been transformed into a mud puddle after the first big event on the square or after the first heavy rain fall.

3. Knowing what you know now, is there anything you would have done differently at Superkilen?

It would have made our life a lot easier to just pick 1 type of bench or 1 type of lamp and not have to draw and redesign all these (around 120 different) objects so that they were fitting in under the Danish playground regulations etc....but it was worth all of it!

Michelle Voss <michellevoss@utexas.edu>
To: Nanna Gyldholm Møller <ng@big.dk>

Fri, Jul 8, 2016 at 9:53 AM

Thank you for all of these great details, Nanna. I love the mailbox idea! Do you have any photos of the mailbox? If not, maybe you could describe the mailbox—how many were there, where were they set up, what type of paper or forms were provided, etc.? Also, it would be interesting to see a sample reply, if you have one.

Michelle

:: Michelle Voss
:: 512.589.8303
:: michellevoss@utexas.edu

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